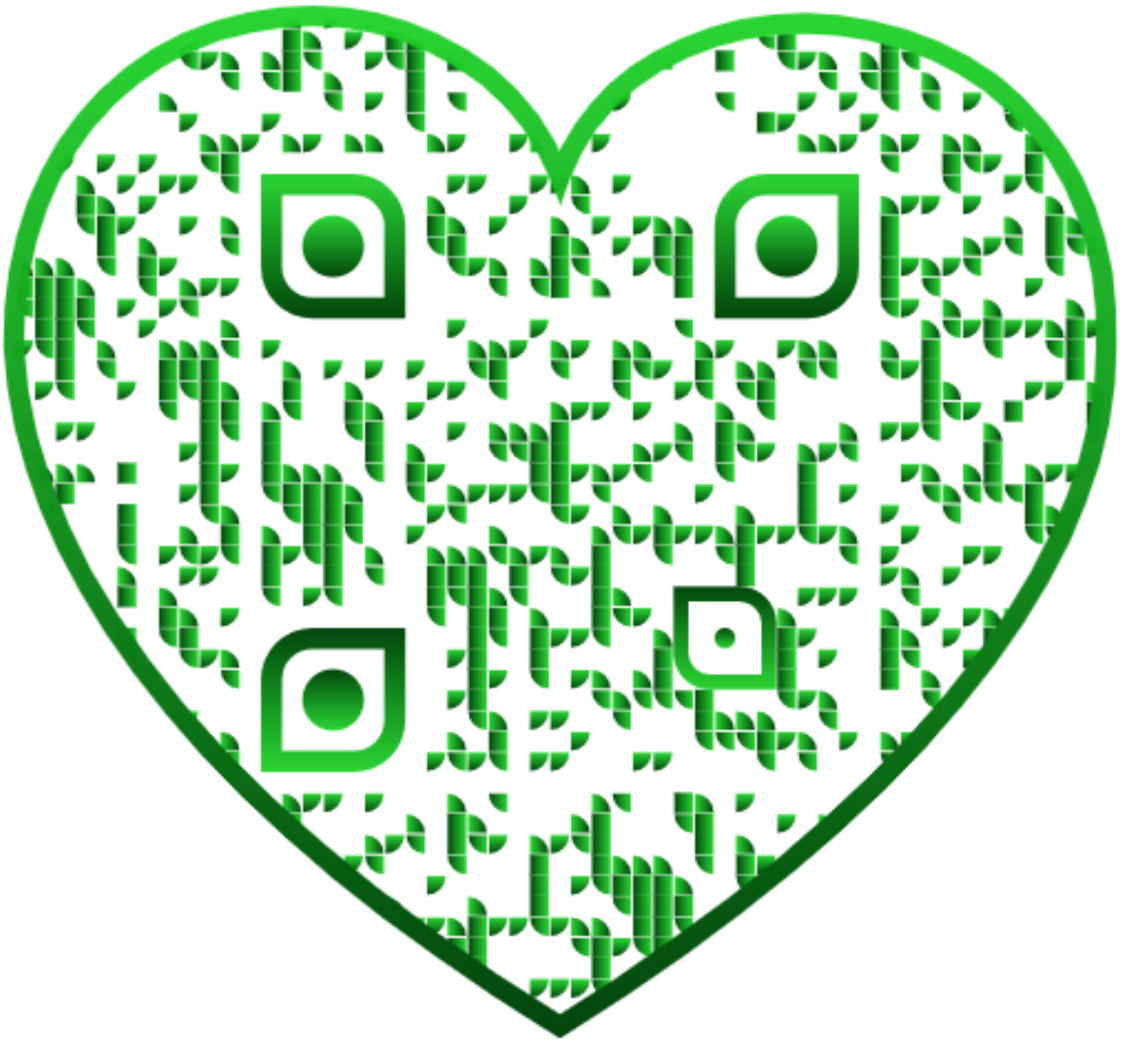
METAL HAMMER

"THIS IS THE FUTURE"

BABYMETAL

REACH FOR THE STARS

FUTURE
ISSUE 327



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38 BABYMETAL

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"HAVE YOU SEEN THIS VIDEO ABOUT CHOCOLATE?"

IT'S HARD TO believe that it's already been five years since I first alerted my *Metal Hammer* colleagues to a truly bizarre new metal video that was racking up millions of views on YouTube. I was Online Editor at the time; I can safely say that it was the most unexpected phenomenon I'd stumbled across during my time at the mag, and I'm not convinced anything has come close to it since. Within a year, we became the first European magazine to put Babymetal on the cover, and we haven't looked back – and neither have they.

Anyone who caught them smashing Brixton Academy or putting smiles on faces at Glastonbury back in the summer knows that Babymetal remain metal's most wholesome experience, and as they prepare to unleash their brand new album onto an unsuspecting world, we're honoured to continue the tradition of being the very first on the scene to find out how life inside the Babymetal camp is going, and what we can expect from that bound-to-be-bonkers record.

If Babymetal aren't your bag, that's cool: you can check out our emotional interview with Jonathan Davis as he channels his grief into a dark and devastating new Korn album, or help us count down the 25 greatest power metal albums ever, or see if you can outdo Steel Panther on our ultimate heavy metal pub quiz. Dig in.

HORNS UP!

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MEET THE BAND

LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR
Louise is, of course, behind all our badass *Hammer* covers, but she was particularly hands-on this issue, overseeing Steve Brown's excellent, space-aged cover shoot with Babymetal at a top-secret location. Well, backstage at Brixton Academy just before they went on.

CHRIS CHANTLER
WRITER
Chris was given the near-impossible mission of curating our look at the 25 greatest power metal albums. We say 'near-impossible', because the bugger actually managed to do it. Give that lad a flaming sword and send him dragon-slaying immediately!

NICK THORPE
WRITER
Nick's background is in tech and games writing, but when he pitched us a brand new idol metal band for an issue where we actually had Babymetal on the cover, it just felt like destiny that he became one of us. Check his interview with Necronomidol on page 30.

THE BIG PICTURE

NEVER IN DOUBT

"We fucking made it!" The relief onstage was palpable as Parkway Drive finally arrived to kick off their headlining set at Bloodstock Festival last month. After a day of gale force winds caused pandemonium on the bill, rumours abounded that the Aussie metal heavyweights might not even get to play. Eventually, they were merely delayed a little, meaning that Catton was treated to one of its most dynamic and celebratory headline sets yet. Buckets of pyro, towering walls of flame, moving platforms, hell, even a string quartet…if nothing else, it proved that Parkway took their slot very seriously indeed and that Bloodstock is a place where anything can (or almost can't) happen.

JAMES SHARROCK

THE HOT TOPIC

“THIS BAND IS A MONSTER”

They’ve conquered charts around the world and will be bringing *We Are Not Your Kind* across Europe for a blockbuster tour in January. The world belongs to Slipknot

WORDS: ALI COOPER

Au contraire, mes amis, you are very much our kind

LAST MONTH, SLIPKNOT’S sixth studio album, *We Are Not Your Kind*, reached No.1 in the UK album charts, dethroning Ed Sheeran to claim The Nine’s first chart-topping record on these shores in 18 years. Axeman Jim Root tells *Hammer* how it really feels to sit atop the mainstream for the first time since *Iowa* burst its way onto the scene.

“It’s a pretty awesome feeling,” says the guitarist. “You could say chart numbers don’t matter but we’re in a day and age where everybody’s streaming music, so to actually sell units and not be an artist like Taylor Swift; that says a lot about our fanbase, maybe even the state of metal in general. To me, it’s a big deal… but if we’d come in at No.20, I’d have said we didn’t care about the charts!”

Their sixth effort – which also topped the US charts, as well as a number of other European countries’ – once again showed off the metal icons’ genre-defining chops, earning a raucous 8/10 review from *Metal Hammer*. For Jim, it’s a big bonus to be able to infiltrate the pop world.

“I get a kick out of it, to have songs with blastbeats and elements of death and black metal in the charts… that’s kind of cheeky!” he laughs “On top of that, [it’s great] to have the creative freedom that we have; we don’t have a team of songwriters, it’s us that write the music, we’re in charge of the artwork and the vision is what Clown [Shawn Crahan] envisioned for the band. That makes this even more special for me. We work hard and we are really passionate about what we do. We take a lot of pride in it, so at least it doesn’t go unrecognised.”

The popularity attached to *We Are Not Your Kind* brings a personal reward to Jim especially: a recognition of the work put into an album that began to cast some doubts in the studio.

“In the early stages of the demos I was putting together, I felt I wasn’t making the mark, that it wasn’t going to be what we’d done on *.5 The Gray Chapter* or anything previous to that,” he reveals. “Clown was really influential for me; he kept me motivated and kept me hard at work. Clown reassured me he could listen to it objectively where I couldn’t. He said, ‘You’re doing great, just keep doing what you’re doing and you’ll see when it comes together.’”

IN THE WAKE of the album’s campaign, Jim reveals the ever-evolving music industry still baffles the Vegas-born guitarist. For a band that began in an era drastically different to the streaming-oriented market of today, Slipknot are still adjusting to the business changing around them.

“I don’t think the label even wanted to print any physical copies!” he posits. “They wanted to do everything via streaming outlets and that seems insane to me: I can’t even wrap my brain around that… maybe that shows my age a bit. I remember going to record shops not knowing anything about a band and choosing records based on the cover or the songtitles. There’s so much out there now that could be so good but it’s almost overlooked because it’s oversaturated with people writing in their bedrooms – it’s information overload.”

“HAVING BLASTBEATS IN THE CHARTS IS KINDA CHEEKY”

SLIPKNOT: ALEXANDRIA CRAHAN CONWAY

It seems the band have firmly closed the book on the turbulent few years that emerged in the shadow of *.5 The Gray Chapter*, though breaking a three-year abstinence from touring to scour the festival circuit this past summer took its toll on the metal juggernauts – Jim Root most of all.

"I've never had this much time off touring, I'm just starting to get into the decadence of it all, it's taken me a little bit longer to get back into it this time. We're playing tighter as a band, we're paying more attention to the songs and practising a little more – well, some of the guys are. I'm not!"

Ahead of the extensive European tour the band announced last month, the Slipknot camp confirm that this return to UK shores will shake up the order of service established at their explosive Download headliner back in June.

"We're gonna tweak things a little bit," Jim suggests. "I'm not exactly sure what we're going to add to the setlist just yet but there's a few songs we weren't able to play on the festival tour. At the festivals, we weren't able to bring the full set that we have and Clown designed, so we'll add more screens and change pyro on a few songs here and there."

Played out in front of that afore-mentioned stage design masterminded by Shawn Crahan, the band's 2020 live guise is a result of a painstaking team effort for The Nine, with each player having to fully embrace their role in metal's most chaotic live band.

"I don't know how Clown does it but he's pulled in a million different directions," Jim muses. "It's really hard to keep up with everything day-to-day. We all try to help out where we can but at the end of the day, we all settled into our roles." He pauses, before adding: "This has created so much opportunity for me. I owe everything in my life to Slipknot. But this band has become such a monster!"

And it's a monster that's hungrier than ever.

***WE ARE NOT YOUR KIND* IS OUT NOW VIA ROADRUNNER. SLIPKNOT TOUR THE UK WITH SUPPORT FROM BEHEMOTH IN JANUARY – TURN TO P.109 FOR DATES**

GENE SIMMONS POKEMON: NINTENDO. JUDAS PRIEST GREAT FROG RINGS: GREAT FROG.

10 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

What's been blowing our tiny brains

WE MISS SUMMER ALREADY
Between Download, Bloodstock, Metallica, Rammstein and more, it was officially the Biggest Summer Ever.

BLOODSTOCK 2020 LOOKS WILD
Luckily, as soon as you've read our review of this year's Bloodstock, you can get stoked for Sacred Reich, Black Dahlia Murder and more ripping up 2020!

IT'S HALLOWEEN SEASON
We don't care if it's technically next month, we're smashing candy and putting on some *Hellraiser* sequels.

All hail Obstagoon!

GENE SIMMONS IS A POKÉMON NOW
Well, basically. There's a familiar-looking new critter in *Pokémon: Sword And Shield*.

THE HOFF AND UNCLE AL ARE BFFS
Ministry legend Al Jourgensen is involved with David Hasslehoff's new album. There's nothing we can add to make that sentence sillier.

MR BUNGLE ARE BACK
The experimental alt-metallers are back for a smattering of shows early next year.

OZZY IS A MUTANT
According to a recent study of his DNA as reported in the *New York times*. Can't wait to see him in the next *X-Men* movie.

COUGARS ARE SCARED OF METALLICA
No, not *those* ones. The actual cats.

JUDAS PRIEST HAVE A COOL NEW JEWELLERY RANGE
The metal legends have joined Slayer and Maiden as Great Frog alumni.

WE STILL DON'T KNOW WHO TORTILLA MAN IS
Seriously guys, stop asking us. We're just as clueless as you.

Holy shit, we need these!

CAN WE HAVE CRADLE OF FILTH TOPMAN SHIRTS?

...and all the other strange requests and prying questions you aimed at Cradle Of Filth frontman, Dani Filth

WORDS: ALI COOPER

AFTER MAKING A return to Bloodstock Festival following a 10-year absence and storming around the continent this autumn, Cradle of Filth are bracing to start work on their anticipated follow-up to 2017's *Cryptoriana: The Seductiveness of Decay*. We challenged frontman and British metal's wicked warlock of the east, Dani Filth, to answer your burning questions. Lord Filth accepted.

After you interviewed Doug Bradley from *Hellraiser* last year [for *Metal Hammer*'s special-edition horror issue], who else would you like to interview and why?
Sabrina Nevine (email)
"I'd be interested in interviewing musicians I like and people involved in the film industry as well, if only to pick their brains rather than talk to them. I have met them all but every time I meet these people, it's always at a do or a show. With that in mind, I would say Danzig, Marilyn Manson and Rob Zombie because they've all been involved in music and they have had very stylistic professional careers. Plus, they have also branched out into cinema."

What was it like performing a UK show with Bring Me The Horizon at All Points East?
James Lee (Twitter)
"It was bloody awesome! I got massive brownie points for that because Bring Me The Horizon are my daughter's favourite band, so I took her with me when we shot the *Wonderful Life* video in Sheffield. She's even in the video shopping in the background so that made her day. Before All Points East, I took a diverted flight to London from South America and I hadn't slept for two days, but it was worth it. The crowd and the production were huge, I couldn't believe I'd been there. I was waiting for a taxi afterwards and totally normal people, not even metalheads, passed me going, 'Dani Filth, yeah!' I've never met a band as nice as Bring Me The Horizon: each one of them came up before and after the show to say thank you."

Cradle Of Filth: preparing to follow up *Cryptoriana...*

Now you're being addressed as Lord Filth, what sort of special privileges do you receive and how large is your retinue?
@rikdog72 (Twitter)
"The amount of people working for the band is about 30. The advantages – you get served quicker in restaurants, you can have your name put on your bank card, and when you book a hotel they upgrade you. It looks more sassy if you go out with a lady – they always treat her as the Lord's Lady. You get better service for everything."

What's the biggest Spinal Tap moment Cradle have ever had onstage?
Debs Bordet (email)
"Unfortunately, not many people got to see it, but we were on tour in the States with The 69 Eyes and 3 Inches

PRESS/ARTŪRS BĒRZIŅŠ

“I’VE NEVER MET A BAND AS NICE AS BRING ME THE HORIZON”

Of Blood in 2007. We'd been talked into buying a blow-up castle for the stage. I said it sounded like the worst thing ever but they swore it was new technology that looks just like stone. We had it delivered to Anaheim House Of Blues; it was too big for the fucking stage and it looked just like a painted bouncy castle! It looked ridiculous, so much so that Jyrki from 69 Eyes came in hungover, saw it, walked out and thought to himself, 'Did that really happen?' So he walked back and by the time he came back in, we'd taken it down! He was convinced it was a dream. It was the complete opposite of the Spinal Tap Stonehenge and probably worse. It makes me angry even thinking about it!"

What's your opinion on today's black metal scene?
@RJ_Fraser (Twitter)
"It's OK. It's not as complicated as it once was. I think *everybody's* branched out and experimented. When the scene first started in 1991–1992, everyone was doing very different things anyway; bands like Necromantia and Moonspell, you didn't have guitarists, you had three bass players. There were a lot of different styles going on back then and I think now people are doing very much the same thing, but there's less constraints now. There's a few bands revising the old style like Immortal, but on the other hand there's great bands like Alcest doing black shoegaze who I absolutely love. The new Deathspell Omega album is incredible, there's new bands like Craft who did one of my favourite albums last year, *White Noise And Black Metal*. The manacles were put on the scene for a long time and the fans demanded it had to be kvlt, which is something we've always rebelled against and I'm glad people share that view now."

When was the last time you had a true diva/rock star moment?
Tommy Webb (email)
"I try not to. People think they're diva moments but they're really just production stuff. The last time was when I was visiting London with my girlfriend a couple of weeks ago: we just got off the plane from LA and we got to our hotel and the room was bloody awful. It was absolutely tiny, you couldn't swing a cat in there, it was all scuffed where people had obviously dragged their bags in. I booked it through a place that works with musicians so they get nice places when they have days off so I was being really nice about it but their staff member was being snotty so I kicked off. I'd have put up with it but I was trying to look after my girlfriend."

Is it true that there is a small mine off the coast of Grimsby solely dedicated to excavating your make-up supplies? Asking for a friend.
@GhostTheWolf (Twitter)
"No, there is not. It's in Sephora – that's not a mine, it's for everybody!"

What have you had more of, hot dinners or bandmembers?
@r_villan22 (Twitter)
"That's a difficult one. I've had 40,792 hot dinners and only 24,152 band members. Hot dinners trumps it by about 20,000 at least."

With H&M stocking Maiden and Metallica t-shirts, surely it's only a matter of time before we get Cradle Of Filth in Topman.
Jayne Meadows (email)
"I went into Asda the other day and they've got Kiss, Pink Floyd and AC/DC shirts in there now. It's like Walmart in the States, that shop is made for tour because they're huge and they have everything, even Misfits and limited-edition *Star Wars* stuff. I'd be very happy if they started selling Cradle shirts. I'm not finicky and it has to be said that the money would be good…"

Am I ever likely to see you in the full *Wonderful Life* outfit at Tesco in Copdock, Ipswich?
Jon Haylock (Twitter)
"I doubt it, I don't shop in Tesco, it's beneath me. I'm a Lord, it's Sainsbury's or Waitrose surely! You might catch us in a Tesco if we're flying back from a show, but I doubt I'll be in full garb."

When is the remastered *Cruelty And The Beast* vinyl being released?
@dominic_powers (Twitter)
"It was remixed and remastered, we pulled the album apart and rebuilt it again. We had to transfer the tapes to digital and bake them in an oven to restore them. It was a real labour of love, we spent as long as we do on a regular album as we did remixing and remastering it. It sounds phenomenal now without sacrificing the atmosphere – we've worked really hard to keep all that. We've added a remixed cover of *Hallowed Be Thy Name*, we went back to the original cover artist and found some different artwork, we rewrote the liner notes and everything. I did two days of solid press for it where I was even interviewed by a precocious eight-year-old kid who, I hasten to add, I beat at Hungry Hippos on camera. Sony has been amazing. We had some legal issues due to past members that held the record back for over a year. If all goes well we should be releasing it during the Halloween months." H

CRADLE OF FILTH WILL BE PLAYING A UK EXCLUSIVE *CRUELTY AND THE BEAST* SHOW AT THE LONDON PALLADIUM ON SATURDAY OCTOBER 19

"WE BOUGHT A BOUNCY CASTLE FOR OUR SHOW"

That's *Lord* Filth to you. On your knees, peasant!

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THE SLAYLIST

MARCUS BRIDGE

The Northlane frontman was a nu metal warrior as a kid, but his tastes have expanded since then

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

Marcus Bridge: thanks, mate, for getting *Sway* stuck in our heads for a week

LISTEN NOW
Listen to Marcus's Slaylist now at tinyurl.com/MarcusSlaylist

"WHEN I STARTED listening to heavier styles of music, a lot of it was nu metal. **MUDVAYNE**, and the song *Dig*, really stuck out. I can go back to and listen to it now and it still has that same effect. There's a longevity to it that a lot of songs from that time don't have. One of my uncles had a huge CD collection of nu metal and old grunge and he also showed me **COAL CHAMBER**'s *Sway*. I remember hearing, *'The roof, the roof, the roof is on fire'* for the first time in a song. Then when it kicks in, it was chaos. I was ten or 11 years old when I got into nu metal but I didn't know what it was at that point. Then **SLIPKNOT** put out *Before I Forget*, and that was the first time I understood what was going on. I remember seeing the video where the masks were on the hat stand on a crappy little TV. With the new Northlane album, *Alien*, I've realised just how much of an influence Corey Taylor has had on me as a vocalist. He has such a special way of expressing his pain.

In a similar way, after writing *Alien*, I realised the impact **SIXX:A.M.**'s *The Heroin Diaries Soundtrack* and the song *Girl With Golden Eyes* has had on me. It's about his process trying to get off heroin. This song shares similarities to what I was trying to do on *Alien*, which is pretty much autobiographical. It's about my upbringing, my parents being addicted to drugs and how that affected me. I wanted to present it in a similar way: gross, not glamorous and uncomfortable, because that's what being around heroin and abusive parents is.

I've always been a huge fan of **AVENGED SEVENFOLD** and of The Rev, the drummer who passed away. When I was younger, I watched a behind-the-scenes documentary of them and he was such a one-of-a-kind writer. I'm pretty sure he might have taken on the whole creative side of *A Little Piece Of Heaven*. It's an insane song, so well thought-out. I like it when bands take risks and do something weird and I like theatrical stuff. Obviously, everyone knows **DEVIN TOWNSEND**, but I'd never given any time to listening to him before because I'm an idiot. But when the video came out for *Genesis*... it's a journey, the most insane thing I've seen in a long time. I'm still trying to get through his other stuff, he's just done so much it's hard to know where to start. I'm a huge fan of **COHEED AND CAMBRIA**, the songwriting is so interesting. Then I got a DVD that had songs ranging from the first three albums and they played *The Crowing*. It's a 3/4 song then it switches to 4/4 later. I'm a nerd for weird song structures and timing changes.

I wanted to play in band when I got into pop punk. For me, **BILLY TALENT** were special, they had a weird spin on punk that I'd not heard before. I actually thought Billy Talent was a person and he had a band! They're a big influence and another one of my favourite bands to this day. There's not a bad Billy Talent song. Also, **PANIC AT THE DISCO** are a band that came at that the right time for me. I was an emo kid and their music was super unique for a pop punk band. It had that theatrical, cabaret kind of feeling. I don't know why I'm drawn to that, I'm just a fan of songwriting that's a bit strange or spooky.

I first heard **UNDEROATH** around the time Taste The Chaos [mids-00s tour] came to Australia. I didn't get to go to the one where they played, but I've been a big fan since hearing *Writing On The Walls*. For a little while, I was going to church and considered myself a Christian, so a band like that was pretty special. In one of the first bands I played in, I played drums and sang like Aaron [Gillespie]. In fact, if any band had an influence on me on this list, it would have to be Underoath." H

"I'D NEVER LISTENED TO DEVIN TOWNSEND BECAUSE I'M AN IDIOT"

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LIFE LESSONS

JOHN BAIZLEY

The Baroness frontman is one of modern metal's most creative minds – and you won't be surprised it's a mind filled with many, many shades

WORDS: MERLIN ALDERSLADE

I NEED TO BE CREATIVE

"The internal combustion engine that gives me the drive to paint is the same thing that gives me the energy and the inspiration to make music. I think, more than choosing one over the other, since I was a very young child, I've been creative, in some form or another. That's something that is a real positive in my life. Acting on my creative impulses is a place where I feel comfortable, and like I feel I have some modicum of control. The big difference is that when I make art, that's me, that's 100% me. I'm expressing myself."

THE COLOUR THING BECAME A HUGE DEAL FOR OUR FANS

"After *Blue Record* came out, our audiences were making these really huge leaps in their understanding of why we had [named albums after] certain colours. And, to be honest, the first couple of albums, we were very specific about which colour it was because they did have a certain feel to us. We didn't really spend a whole lot of time explaining what those reasons were, because our audience had better and more varied answers, and I didn't wanna put our audience into a box and say, 'Oh no, those are the wrong reasons!' Music is an interpretive thing; it's not meant for an audience of one, it's meant for an audience of whomever. So if everybody digests the album and interprets the imagery and the title and the lyrics in a different way, then I'm happy, because that's been my experience with the music that I like listening to."

BARONESS ISN'T JUST ABOUT ME

"It may be my *vehicle*, OK. That may be true. I write the lyrics, that's a significant portion of the song, and I write the heartbeat of the song. There's a sound that Baroness has, and I think it's safe to say that may have a lot to do with me. But I'm not presumptuous enough to think we can get better without the full cooperation and participation of the band. That said, it means I need very competent players – all the players at this point are superior to me on a technical level. Which is great, that makes me better. But they're also intelligent, they have very valuable opinions. I think any of them will tell ya I'm a bit neurotic and probably obsessive compulsive and a control freak, but there's nothing I like better than being proven wrong, and I know it."

OUR MUSIC CAN BE DARK AND UPLIFTING ALL AT ONCE

"I can write an incredibly dark, personal, emotional song, but it doesn't come across as only those descriptors. It can be incredibly uplifting, or it can be uptempo, or aggressive or fast or mellow or whatever. In a four-piece band with guitars, bass drums, vocals, you're really fucking limited in the grand scale, so why not do things that *shouldn't* work and try to *make* that work. That's become another hallmark of our sound – very disparate elements working harmonically."

WE'VE NEVER FIT INTO A 'SCENE'

"That's one of the things I'm most proud of at this point in our career, but it's one of the things that have been the most difficult for the people we work with. Who do we tour with? What kind of band are we? You know? And the other simple fact is that when we sit down and write a record, I look to the immediate past and say, 'What were the key elements that worked best with our former record? Let's not do that, let's work on something different.' Our audience never knows exactly what to expect. We wanna be dynamic, we wanna play songs from our back catalogue when we do shows, we don't wanna make things simple or obvious or ordered correctly. The fun is in the chaos."

"I'M A NEUROTIC CONTROL FREAK"

ROCK BANDS NEED TO CATCH UP

"If you look at genres like hip hop or pop, it's about the single. So when you listen to Spotify or Apple Music or YouTube or the primary sources of listening to music, we're skipping songs, we're listening to different styles, different genres, our dynamics are all over the place. So, as a contemporary band, why wouldn't you adjust to that? I think that we've been doing it all along: making sure there's a lot of territory covered on our albums. I'm not saying I wanna write 'singles'; what I'm saying is if most people's listening diet now goes from one type of song to another type of song… to fit the contemporary model, you can write music like that now."

SONIC YOUTH CHANGED MY LIFE

"The first show I ever saw that was an absolute game-changer was in Richmond, Virginia, in this little island in the middle of the James River in Richmond called Brown's Island, and it was Sonic Youth, Superchunk and the Boredoms. That's a diverse and challenging bill to see with 8-10,000 people. There was noise, there were hooks, there was melody, there was dissonance, it was an amazing thing. It appealed to me on a fundamental level that I seem to have maintained, which is that variety is a good thing in music."

YOU DO YOU

"The worst kind of advice was any advice I was given when we were a young band. When anybody would tell me, 'This is how it is, you should do this, you should do that in order to further your career.' I ignored them, because I didn't consider it a career at that point. I don't think that when you're starting a musical project when you're young, the endgame is that you become popular or you become successful. I think the most important thing that no one ever tells you is: believe your own bullshit! Do it as hard as you fucking can. Don't accept criticism like, 'This is too weird, you're not gonna make it with this.' Don't accept that. Music is meant to be self-expression. If it's genuine self-expression and everybody in the world hates it, you've still done something good, because you've been genuine. If you're making art and somebody tells you what you 'should' do, that's bad advice. If somebody has a genuine conversation with you and if the criticism comes from a place that doesn't shit on what you're doing, but helps it grow naturally, then it's good advice, you know?"

I HAVE TO KEEP CHANGING IT UP

"I don't wanna figure out the format to 'success'. For me, the format to *personal* success is to have tried everything. If the point of my life is to have as much

PRESS

John Baizley:
renaissance man

Variety is the spice of life, says John. We have to agree

"BELIEVE YOUR OWN BULLSHIT AS HARD AS YOU CAN!"

experience and go on as many adventures as possible, then my art and my music should reflect some element of that."

BEING CYNICAL IS OK

"I think a healthy amount of paranoid scepticism is good, as along as it doesn't rule you. It's a very valuable skill to learn when somebody is bullshitting you to meet their ends, and when somebody is giving you advice that maybe is not good."

DIY FTW

"The thing is, in this era of music that we're in, if you're a motivated individual who's in charge of a band or part of a band, you can do a significant amount of what used to need to be done by labels. So if you've got the energy and the ambition, I think it's a worthwhile endeavour to try to do everything yourself. Try to record it, learn about engineering, release your record, just do everything. Trying anything becomes a valuable skill, because you either realise that you don't have an aptitude for it, or you do, and then you can work with your engineer and with your booking agent and with your manager and with your bus driver and whomever it is. Everybody in music is working really hard because they love doing it. It's not a particularly lucrative business. So you gotta love doing it, cause you're gonna be broke!"

...BUT TAKE HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT

"There is a point where you have to be self-aware enough to realise that you have grown to a point or a position where you're not capable of doing certain things. Or, what's happened in recent years with our band is we've become confident enough in our own capabilities and our own vision that we accept outside advice, primarily from our producer. We feel confident in having a fifth opinion that we can talk about. You don't take anything at face value, you can talk about it. Before that it was like, 'Maybe that chorus is too long.' But learn how to book a show, then you'll know what your booking agent is doing and you'll have respect for that. Learn how to drive yourself on tour, use a map, deal with club owners and local crew, learn how to deal with all these people that are working harder than you do. You work for an hour and a half if you're lucky onstage, at the point where you have a whole team working for you." H

***GOLD & GREY* IS OUT NOW VIA ABRAXAN HYMNS. BARONESS TOUR THE UK WITH VOLBEAT STARTING THIS MONTH – SEE P.109 FOR DATES**

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ANNIHILATOR

Canada's thrash heroes are getting mad as hell

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

Jeff Waters: no more Mr Nice Guy

IT'S BEEN A mad year for Jeff Waters, founder of Canadian thrash titans Annihilator. Moving continents to set up residence in the UK and overcoming personal turmoil in the process, Jeff built a new studio to ensure the band could come back firing on all cylinders.

What does it mean for Annihilator that you're now based in the UK?
"Now I can't say, 'Sorry I can't come for a meeting because I've got a long flight!' Plus, this studio is a dream place. It's got all the mixing facilities of a usual studio, as well as somewhere we can get friends like Anthrax or Testament – fantastic bands – to come write songs."

Have you had anybody over yet to test it out?
"We've just had our good friend John Gallagher Raven in to sing some back-ups on the new record. We also brought in the awesome Kat Shevil Gillham, a vocalist from a lot of doom/death metal bands from Durham. She's got this Dani Filth meets all-out death metal voice, which alongside John – who has the loudest scream around – was like a collision of old-school and new music."

Are you alone in the producer's seat?
"I've brought our bassist Rich Hinks in again, and guitarist Aaron Homma, determined to come up with a truly great album. I don't want to be a band that make just two good songs per album – it feels very lazy, like the band have lost it when you find something like that. We want to reach *Never, Neverland* levels again where everything feels like a 9/10, because that's as close to perfect as we'll ever get."

THE FACTS

ALBUM: 17

STUDIO: Watersound Studios UK

PRODUCER: Jeff Waters

EXPECT: Old-school thrash given a furious modern sheen

Speaking of classic albums, this year will mark 30 years since your debut – does that make you dewy eyed at all to revisit that kind of material?
"For most bands that never works. But then a little band called Judas Priest put out their 12th album, *Painkiller*, and totally changed the game, going from that bluesy early stuff to a record that slayed *everybody*. So I followed that and did whatever the hell I wanted! I also wrote closely with our drummer [Fabio Alessandrini], making sure we used an actual drummer when writing this album - something I hadn't done since the early days. I went back to that old-school way of writing, marvelling at this 25-year-old kid who's a combination of Tommy Aldridge, Dave Lombardo and Deen Castronovo, and having that instinctively took me back to the same kinds of things as the early stuff."

Has all the personal change of this past year affected the way you approach the record at all?
"I'm not good at writing aggressive music or lyrics – I just didn't have that real aggression in me to do it. I'd get a riff then throw in a big rock chorus. But there's been some trauma recently that put my guard up and that fed into what I think is the first album where I am feeling real, legitimate anger. It feels like those early days, but heavier – screw the clean, beautiful part in the middle, let's punch a wall!"

We lost Randy Rampage [vocalist on the band's debut *Alice in Hell*] last year – has that influenced anything on the record?
"The tour we had to cancel last fall, we'd originally planned on bringing Randy and his band along, but he passed before we could confirm. He was a great storyteller and a real nice guy – without him I don't think we'd have had the success we did, as he had a one-of-a-kind stage presence and had this crass punk attitude where he didn't need to pitch his voice, it was always perfect for what he wanted to do. We want to pay some respects and do something nice for him on this upcoming tour."

How do you think people will react to the new material?
"This record is going to fuck up everyone that hears it – 'Who's this?!' Annihilator fans will know it's us, but people are going to be asking if somebody came up on the street and cut my family into pieces!" H

ANNIHILATOR'S NEW ALBUM IS EXPECTED IN JANUARY 2020

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THE STORY BEHIND

JESUS CHRIST POSE BY SOUNDGARDEN

It was the song that helped Soundgarden become a lynchpin of the Seattle grunge revolution – even if it courted some serious controversy along the way

WORDS: GREG PRATO

AS THE 80s transitioned into the 90s, the most popular subgenres of heavy music appeared to be hair metal and thrash. And for the most part, it was all growing terribly predictable and stale – if you took a gander at MTV's *Headbangers Ball* at the time, most of the bands looked and sounded the same (OK, OK… *apart* from the leading artists of each genre – especially Guns N' Roses and Metallica, respectively). Just as punk rock took aim at prog and rock royalty in the 70s, the music world needed another movement to shake up the dreary state of rock in the early 90s. Thankfully, the back-to-basics grunge movement came to our rescue – and just in the nick of time.

In 1991, two bands based around Seattle were about to have their big breakthrough – Nirvana with *Nevermind* and Pearl Jam with *Ten*. A few months earlier, Alice In Chains had been given their own taste of success with their *Man In The Box* single, taken from their album *Facelift*, released the year prior. Finally, there was something out there making Seattle known for things other than Boeing and Starbucks.

Having previously signed to a major, Soundgarden, too, were expected to join the scene's frontrunners, especially when their third full-length album, *Badmotorfinger*, was released in October that year, preceded by the record's huge lead-off single, *Jesus Christ Pose*.

The band had had difficulty finding a permanent bass player for while leading up to that point, but when Ben Shepherd arrived, long-time members Chris Cornell (vocals/guitar), Kim Thayil (guitars), and Matt Cameron (drums) had seemingly struck gold, finding a bassist who was also a damn fine songwriter. Kim recalls what the band were up to during the early part of '91, and how Ben helped kickstart the conception of *Jesus Christ Pose*.

"We were at the original Avast! Studios. It was run by Stuart Hallerman, who was our original soundman, and he used to record a lot of demos for us," he reveals. "They had a cement-floored recording room, and we'd go there and rehearse during the day, then at night we'd push our amps in the back and he'd have clients come in and record."

It was during this early phase of feeling out the new material that they stumbled upon a soon-to-be Soundgarden classic. "I think we were jamming, whacking that out on bass," Kim recalls. "That was definitely one of Ben's riffs – the main riff. And then Matt started drumming on it. It was very quick."

While Ben may have brought the basis of the idea for the song, input from both Kim and Chris put *Jesus Christ Pose* over the top. "It was hard to discern exactly what the notes and the rhythm were from what Ben was playing, because it was very loud, blurry and quick," Kim notes. "So while I was trying to figure out that groove, I came up with that weird 'pterodactyl on crack' guitar line. It was easier for me to hear that odd melody. That was my contribution. So we took that riff and recorded it. Chris took the tape home, listened to it and tried to learn the guitar part himself. And then he came up with the bridge and turnaround." And so, somewhat rarely, all four members of a band are credited for writing the music of a song that'd send them into the big time.

WITH MAINSTREAM HARD rock being at one of its silliest and most posey summits circa '91, in the song's lyrics Chris decided to point out how ridiculous the 'rock stars' of the world often came across.

THE FACTS

RELEASED:
1991

ALBUM:
Badmotorfinger

PERSONNEL:
Chris Cornell (vocals, guitar), Kim Thayil (guitar), Ben Shepherd (bass), Matt Cameron (drums)

HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
30 (UK)

GETTY

Soundgarden (left to right): Chris Cornell, Kim Thayil, Ben Shepherd, Matt Cameron

"I think [Chris's] reasons were he was – ironically – sick of celebrities and rock stars who'd pulled that vulnerable, suffering sort of pose and/or attitude on their fanbase," offers Kim. "Specifically, there were a lot of rock guys that did that arms-outstretched pose; that sort of 'victim that's suffering for their fans and their art'. It's kind of annoying. Chris took a stab at it, on some levels mocked it, and the irony fell somewhere else, I guess! Ha ha!"

Indeed, quite a few local Seattle bands apparently felt that Chris was a bit of a 'posing rocker' himself, including Mudhoney's Mark Arm, who in the book *Grunge Is Dead: The Oral History Of Seattle Rock Music*, recalls: "Chris's antics got a little annoying. I'm all for somebody flailing around on stage and engaging the audience, but he would wear a tearaway shirt. It's one thing to take off your shirt, but it's another thing to pre-rip the seams. He'd grab the front of his shirt and pull it straight off in a forward motion. It was a pre-planned part of the act."

The video to accompany *Jesus Christ Pose* featured striking imagery, such as the bandmembers walking through a desert, hanging upside down, weather vanes spinning, a Terminator-esque metal skull, and lots and lots of cross imagery – which landed Soundgarden in some hot water with MTV.

"IT WAS A PTERODACTYL ON CRACK"

KIM THAYIL

"I liked the video," Kim says, "but one thing that stood out was that we used a lot of provocative images of the cross. We had a few images of an upside-down cross, and of a burning cross. The reference of a burning cross had been used in lyrics that Hiro [Yamamoto, Soundgarden's original bassist] had written in earlier songs. Generally we used a visual image or a burning cross. And MTV didn't want to [play it]. They held back showing it in their regular prime-time rotation. And then, shortly before, Madonna did that video for *Like A Prayer* with a burning cross! It's a like a 'dancer/actress' can put a burning cross in her video, but a rock band – an integrated rock band, by the way – has a far briefer image of a burning cross and MTV worries about it. Well, that was the excuse they used. And we specifically wanted a woman of colour to be on the cross – we didn't want a white guy to be on the cross. We wanted representation with minorities in our videos – and girls who weren't dancing on the hood of a car. It was always an uphill battle for some reason."

Eventually, MTV did show the clip for *Jesus Christ Pose*, but only late at night and on *Headbangers Ball* in the US. Despite the lack of airtime for the clip, though, *Badmotorfinger* still became Soundgarden's big commercial

With *Jesus Christ Pose*, the late, great Chris Cornell took a swipe at posing rock stars

"WE DIDN'T JUST WANT GIRLS DANCING ON CARS"

KIM THAYIL

breakthrough. While this was in no small part thanks to the album's second single, the more melodic and radio-friendly *Outshined*, it was certainly *Jesus Christ Pose* that introduced many a headbanger to the band in the first place. Immediately, the song became a concert mainstay – guaranteed to get the moshers moshing and the crowdsurfers surfing from the second the manic drumming and wall of feedback kicked in. When performed live, the track took on a life all its own – as evidenced by a stellar rendition recorded in 1993 and included as a b-side of the *Black Hole Sun* single a year later. And due to its extreme nature concerning both the vocals and the drumming, the song would often be situated either at the beginning of the set (à la the tour in support of *Superunknown*), or at the end (à la the tour in support of *Down On The Upside*). For Kim, it's still a personal favourite. "I still love it," he says. "I'm pretty sick of hearing a lot of Soundgarden songs, but not *Jesus Christ Pose*."

Soundgarden would call it quits in 1997, at what seemed like the height of their popularity, but eventually regrouped in 2010. In addition to touring regularly, the group offered up a steady stream of releases – a best-of compilation (2010's *Telephantasm*), their first-ever live album (2011's *Live on I-5*), their sixth full-length studio effort (2012's well-received *King Animal*), a b-sides/rarities compilation (2014's *Echo Of Miles: Scattered Tracks Across The Path*), and expanded reissues of earlier albums. Things appeared to still be going according to plan – including writing and working on ideas for a seventh album – when the band launched a US tour in the spring of 2017. Shockingly, it all came to an abrupt end when Chris Cornell took his own life in his hotel room, immediately after Soundgarden had completed a show in Detroit, on May 18, at the age of 52.

Despite the tragic ending, looking back on Soundgarden's body of work today, it certainly stacks up splendidly within the annals of rock and metal history. And *Jesus Christ Pose* remains the band's most fang-snarlingly ferocious tune of them all.

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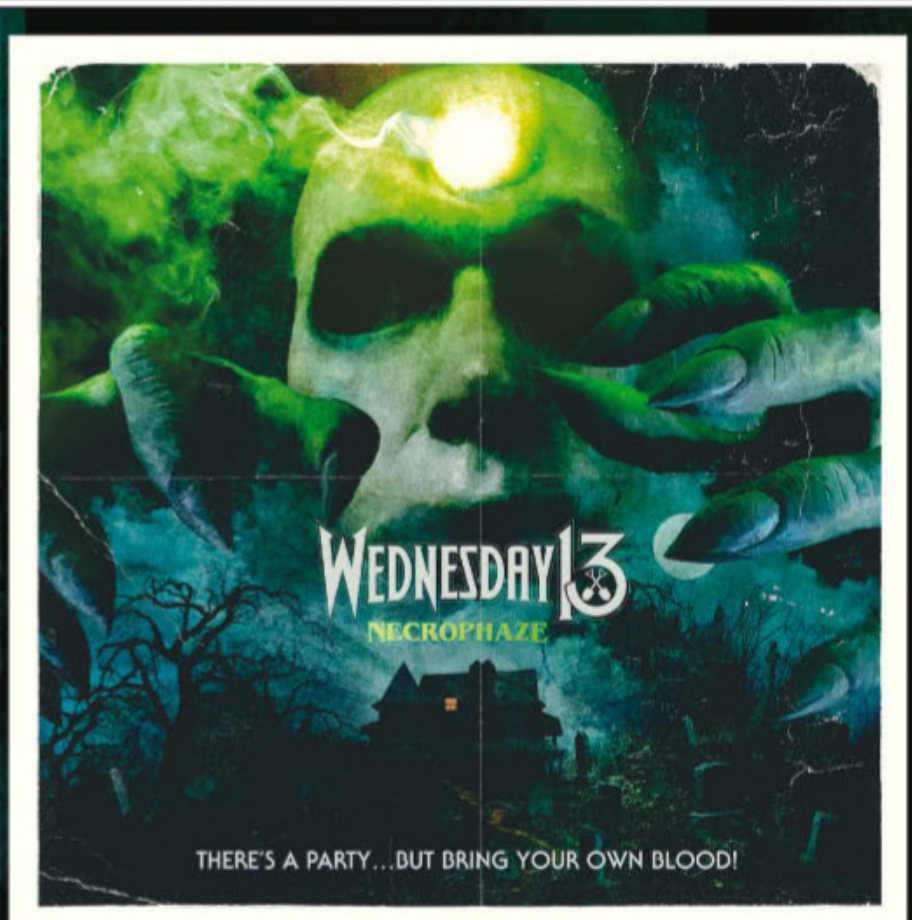

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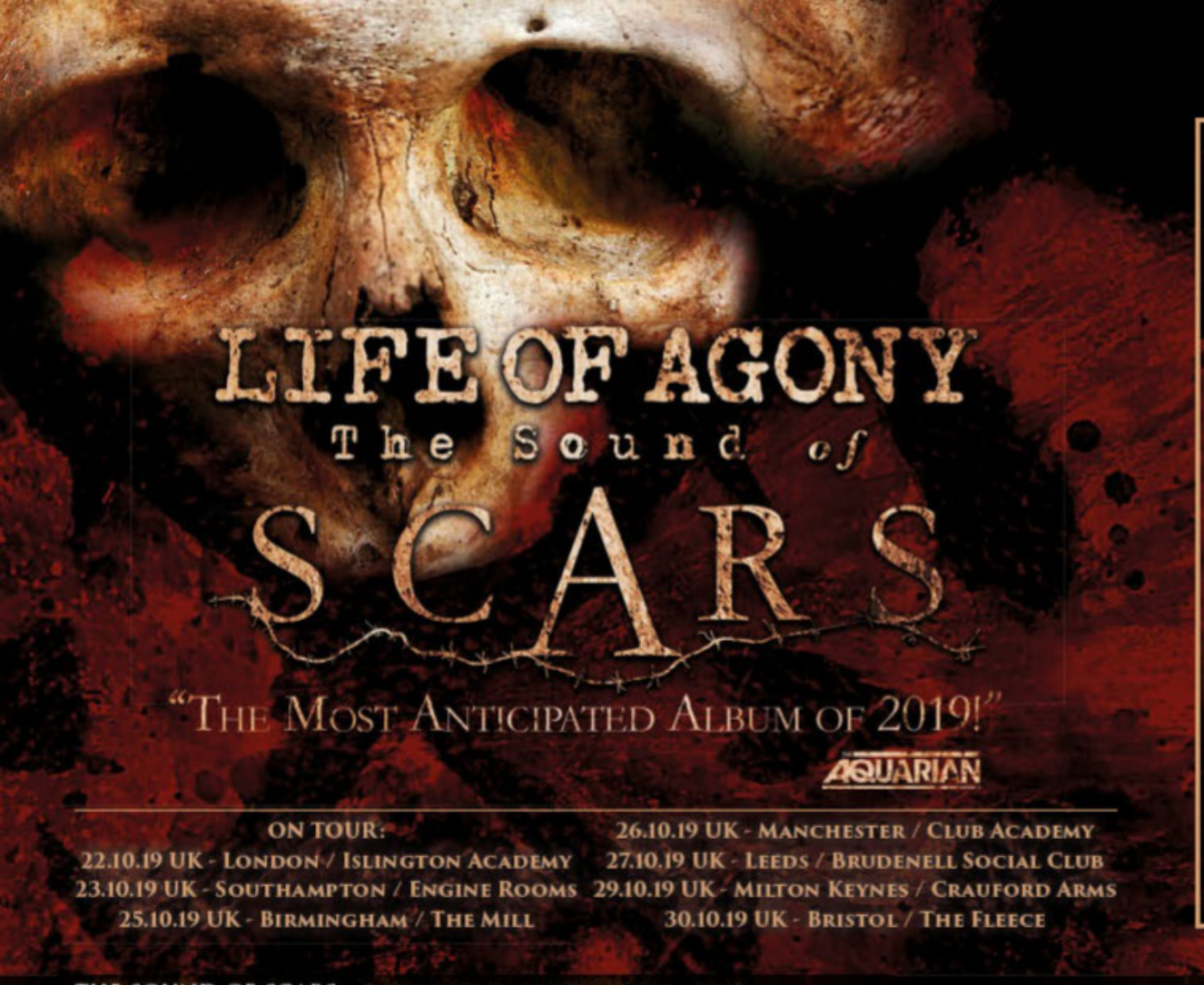

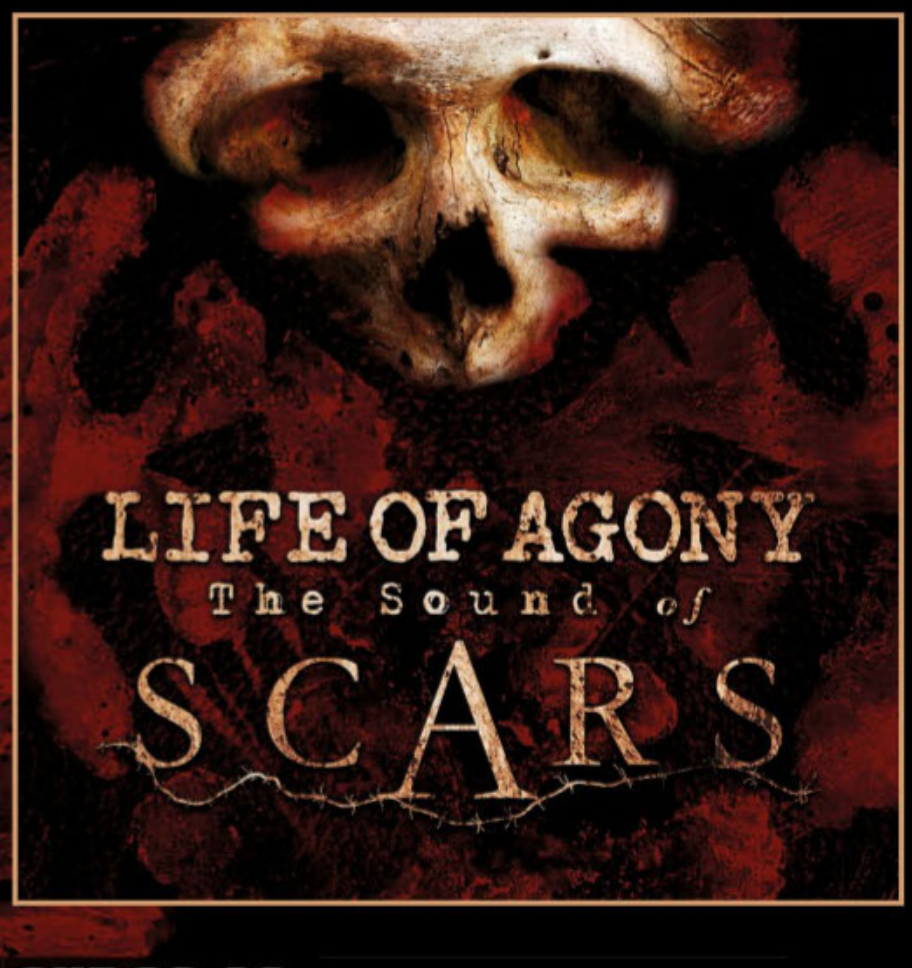

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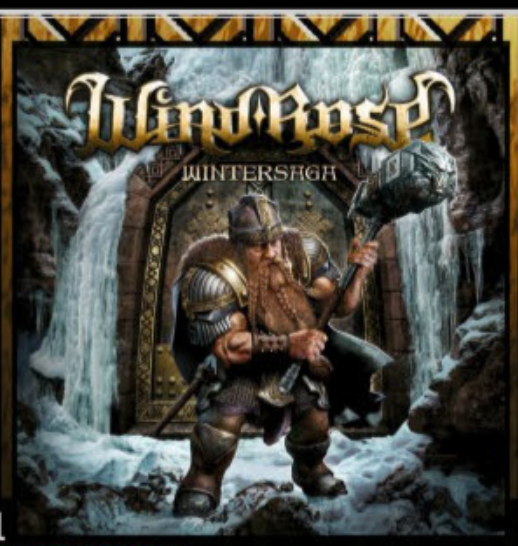

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And other demands, accusations and ponderings you lot felt compelled to share with us this month.

COMPACT DICKS

Guys, I know that CDs are a bit 'old hat' nowadays, but the free CDs you used to do with the magazine were my favourite way of discovering new bands and seeing good songs I missed from the year – any chance of doing some again soon?
Manish Patel (email)

No. Just kidding: we still roll out CDs every so often as we know there are plenty of you out there still repping for physical and we haven't forgotten you. Watch this space (and did you check out the free Slipknot-themed CD we did in the summer? It was sic.)

TOOL FOR A LIFETIME

I love Tool, I've been following them since the early 90s, but am I the only one who thought the new album was a massive letdown? I'm not saying it's *Chinese Democracy* levels of bad but 13 years for, well, just another Tool album has left a bitter taste in my mouth if I'm being honest.
Bri Stevis (email)

Is it possible to meet expectations when you've been building them up for more than a decade? Probably not. Cheap shot on *Chinese Democracy*. Merl wrote a whole blog defending that album (no, seriously: it was a slow week).

OLD RAGE

Really enjoying the 50 Years Of Metal pieces, though I refuse to accept that Faith No More released *The Real Thing* 30 years ago. I'm 100% sure that was just a couple of years ago, right? Guys? Right?! Please say it's not just me.
Davyd Roberts (email)

What are you talking about? We're still getting pumped for the first ever 'Download Festival', which we hear is gonna be a pretty big deal. Oh no, wait, sorry, that was actually 16 years ago and we're all basically dead now.

AMY, OUI

With the likes of Nightwish and Within Temptation getting covers in the last couple of years, when will we finally get to see an Evanescence cover on *Metal Hammer*? Amy is a trailblazer and it must be time for a new album soon. A girl can live in hope, right?
Tera Dailley (Facebook)

It's not something we *wouldn't* consider, put it that way. Hey, we put Deathstars on the cover once, so we can safely say that anything is possible. Watch this space.

NOB ZOMBIE

I have to say, as a long-time fan – I'm one of the few freaks who thinks his *Halloween* movies are better than the originals – I'm not very excited about this new Rob Zombie movie. I'd have higher hopes if his last few weren't below par and I'm not sure this is a sequel (prequel?) that any of us needed. It breaks my heart to say that but it's true.
Evie D (email)

We didn't much dig his last movie, but we still think *3 From Hell* looks pretty solid, truth be told. We liked his *Halloween* movies too, though you're pushing it with the 'better than the originals' chatter. We're telling John Carpenter. We have his number (we don't).

#TWEETS

So, bought my edition of @MetalHammer today. My 6 year old made me so proud when she said "can I have @Slipknot in my room?". I'm one #prouddaddy
@saffa_matt

I'm not a Justin Bieber fan myself but come on tool have love for your fans. Why make sad ass comment like? Your fans put you where you are today, without them you might be flipping burgers in McDonalds for a living.
@I_Am_Judoka

Sid jumped down in the audience in 99 just to headbutt me cause i wore a gasmask.. That´s when i knew Slipknot is my band <3
@WSme4gol

Manson has no obligation to adhere to one set of principles for the sake of shocking the public. Shocking the public is old hat and everyone's a fucking bitch ass snowflake anyway. Let the man be an artist and make whatever he pleases.
@Neo_Viol

Metal always had multiculturalism. For example Brazil. Two things people knew about this country, good at football and Sepultura
@levente2805

PRESS/TRAVIS SHINN.

Rammstein: dissected

STILL ON TRACK

I really liked the track-by-track analysis of the latest Rammstein album in your June issue. How would this make for a monthly article? Every month an album of some significance gets dissected along with a scholar in poetry and/or language. I would certainly enjoy that!

Kjell-Ivar Aarli (Facebook)

We dig this idea. A poet dissecting Cannibal Corpse lyrics? A history lecturer doing a deep dive on Sabaton? A sex education teacher looking through Steel Panther song… actually, fuck that.

STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND

Is it just me or does Maxine from *Stranger Things* remind you of Dave Mustaine?

Tanvir Choudhury (Facebook)

We're not totally convinced that either of them would be delighted with that particular comparison to be honest, mate.

FIFTY NOT OUT

After seeing the latest edition of *Hammer* with the Top 50 Judas Priest songs, I was encouraged to create a CD listing them. I did have to include a further 10 songs, though. And I did the same a couple of years back when you highlighted Iron Maiden! More of the same please, *Metal Hammer.*

Matt Burridge (Facebook)

There aren't, truth be told, enough bands on the scale of Maiden and Priest to warrant the full 50 Best Songs treatment every issue, but we'll certainly be doing a few similar such things in the coming months. Starting with the 25 greatest power metal albums ever in this very issue! Crumbs, we're nice to you.

STICK TO THE PLAN

I loved the free thrash metal sticker set in the last issue. More of that please – I still have 35cm of space left on my work laptop to abuse. Don't tell my boss, though…

Kirsty Leeith (email)

Laptop? Why stop at laptop? Cover your desk. Slather your chair in 'em. Make a giant pentagram of stickers across the entranceway to your office. And for what it's worth, we'll defo do some more sets to help you achieve such nonsense.

THE BIG DEBATE

Our sister mag *Prog* recently posted an opinion piece by writer Alison Reijman asking people at gigs to stop chatting. We felt it pertinent to metal shows too. As ever, you guys had Some Thoughts of your own…

SHE SAID:

"There's nothing wrong with a bit of banter between fellow gig goers between numbers, hopefully expressing amazement and wonder at the brilliance of the show, and I'm absolutely sure that bands welcome such positive chat. But I really can't think of anything more disheartening or disrespectful than for acts to observe a section of the audience paying no attention to what they're doing."

YOU SAID:

It's very odd that people are willing to pay so much to drink and talk. When I'm at a show, I'm there to watch and listen. I'll talk on the way home.

Eric Wilt (Facebook)

This is my pet hate at gigs along with people viewing and taking photos with cell phones. They should be banned at gigs. I salute the bands who've done this.

Jan Bujko (Facebook)

I've stood at the back of gigs and it's intolerable and usually alcohol-induced. I find it incredible that people buy a ticket for a gig and want to talk all the way through it. If you just want a chat go down to the pub, it'll work out cheaper for you. I now stand at the front next to speakers where fans are more attentive to the music and the music drowns out the chatter.

Alan Duggan (Facebook)

It's not as bad as people who go crazy at concerts.

Wiulkl O'Neil (Facebook)

JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/METALHAMMERREADERS

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers

ASAGRAUM
DAWN OF INFINITE FIRE
"A ferocious statement of intent that'd make the ol' Horned One proud."
MERLIN ALDERSLADE
EDITOR

BABYMETAL
METAL GALAXY
"A sugar-rush journey through their insane universe."
ELEANOR GOODMAN
DEPUTY EDITOR

CHELSEA WOLFE
THE BIRTH OF VIOLENCE
"Songwriting at its most elegant and devastating. A searchlight in dark times."
JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR

MASTODON
CRACK THE SKYE
"Never gets old. Pretty sure I could listen to *The Last Baron* until the end of time."
VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR

CHELSEA WOLFE
THE BIRTH OF VIOLENCE
"Hauntingly beautiful. My favourite Chelsea Wolfe album so far."
ALICE PATTILLO
ONLINE EDITOR

SLIPKNOT
WE ARE NOT YOUR KIND
"Contender for Album Of The Year, surely?"
LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR

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NOV 8 FORUM - **LONDON, UK** | NOV 9 THE WATERFRONT - **NORWICH, UK**
NOV 11 ENGINE ROOMS - **SOUTHAMPTON, UK** | NOV 12 TRAMSHED - **CARDIFF, UK**
NOV 13 ROADMEMBER - **NORTHAMPTON, UK** | NOV 14 NORTHUMBRIA INSTITUTE - **NEWCASTLE, UK**

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NEW NOISE

NECRONOMIDOL

This dark idol unit has risen from the Tokyo underground to the world stage – and they've brought the Great Old Ones with them

WORDS: NICK THORPE

"MY NAME IS Rei Imaizumi, I bring a smile to everyone. Please call me Rei-chan!" It's the standard introduction you'd expect from a Japanese idol performer, but just moments prior Rei had joined the rest of her group in telling the assembled crowd that she was going to choke them to death. The group's most recent music video sees them summon an eldritch abomination to destroy Tokyo, as blood pours from the head of the newscaster reporting the incident. Collectively, Necronomidol represents the cutest face of the apocalypse. The Tokyo-based quintet have won over a broad spectrum of idol 'otaku' – that's superfans – and diehard metal fans back home, thanks to songs covering a wide variety of metal styles tied together by Lovecraftian horror themes, and they're also gaining a devoted international following.

Part of that overseas appeal may result from the fact that the group possesses a rarity in Japan's idol culture – an American producer. "I think I may still be the only one," laughs Ricky Wilson. After helping other idol groups with international bookings, he decided to form Necronomidol in 2014 – a time when the DIY alternative idol scene was still in its infancy. He admits that this, as well as working in a second language, caused some initial problems, saying, "there weren't a lot of groups where we could say, 'Oh, we're like these guys!' We were kind of doing our own thing, and so for the first half-year or so, just finding shows that we could play was very much an uphill battle."

The group's members also had little familiarity with metal, and found themselves learning on the job. "Before I joined Necronomidol, I only knew about Babymetal and some groups like that," admits Risaki Kakizaki, who has been part of the group since the beginning. "But since I joined I've been really getting into metal, and lately I've been listening to a lot of Cradle Of Filth and Equilibrium."

For Ricky, working with an idol group means a chance to experiment. "One of the most interesting things about idol groups as opposed to bands is, more so than the genre, the concept is what holds everything together. So as long as the song or choreography, or music video fits with the concept of the group, it's accepted."

The group's latest release, *Scions Of The Blasted Heath*, shows the breadth of the group's approach, opening with the mournful, black metal-infused track *Salem* and closing with *Lament Configuration*, which incorporates powerful 80s synths and pop melodies. "If you like depressive black metal, you're going to find songs you like; if you like the really oily, greasy 80s metal, you're going to find some songs you like in there as well. I think any kind of metal fans who are coming in, they're going to find something that they can take away," says Risaki of the group's repertoire. "One thing you don't normally see with a lot of these genres, especially black metal, is to have 'cute' female vocals on there – it's very unusual to have that kind of balance," adds Rei. "I think, for fans of metal, hopefully they'll really like that. It's something a little bit fresh."

THE FUSION OF idol and metal sensibilities runs through the entire project. Where the members don't play instruments on stage, they take pride in other aspects of their performance, particularly dancing. This is seen as an integral part of the show, working with the music to convey the lyrical themes of each song.

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Powerful guitar riffs combined with blasts of synthesiser and catchy idol choruses

FOR FANS OF:
Babymetal, Band-Maid, Blood Stain Child

LISTEN TO:
Children Of The Night

This *Sucker Punch* sequel looks a bit dark

"For a lot of other idol groups, it's just dancing in step with the songs, but for Necronomidol it's almost more of a play," explains Himari Tsukishiro. "Our choreographers always put a backstory behind the songs so even if you don't understand the lyrics, if you're taking in the choreography and the music together, the story behind it will really become clear." Of course, the members have a uniquely Japanese take on those themes. Himari compares Lovecraft's work to that of Ranpo Edogawa, while Kunogi Kenbishi draws manga comparisons.

"I started with *The Colour Out of Space*. It was really interesting because I like occult manga, horror manga, and there's one called *Outer Zone* that I'm a big fan of, so I thought, 'Oh, this is similar to some of the stuff in *Outer Zone*,' so it's a really easy story for me to get into," says the new member, who joined earlier in 2019. "The second song on our new EP is *Phantasamagoria Cosmos*, which is actually based on *The Colour Out of Space*. For me, I felt that this was destiny at work."

"THIS BAND IS MORE LIKE A PLAY"

Having recently celebrated their fifth anniversary, Necronomidol are concentrating on spreading their particular brand of intoxicating darkness across the world. That's evident in songs like *Children Of The Night*, which is sung entirely in English, as much as in the group's frequent overseas tours. Last year saw them bringing the full Necroma Band outside of Japan for the first time, and they've just visited the UK for the third time as part of a European tour that has seen them playing an unusual assortment of shows, from the Hyper Japan expo in London to a gig with Bonehunter in Finland. "We want to play Wacken," says Risaki, explaining the group's next goals, before new member Michelle cuts in with a loftier goal. "I want to conquer the world!" With unknowable forces on their side, Necronomidol have every chance of doing just that.

***SCIONS OF THE BLASTED HEATH* IS OUT NOW VIA IMPERIET IV**

PRESS

NEW NOISE

IVY CROWN

This melodic metalcore crew have tackled some hard-hitting issues on one of the year's most promising debuts

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

"EVERYTHING IS GOING to get better," says vocalist Maria Kjær when asked what message she wants people to take away from Ivy Crown's debut album, *Echo*. "Just keep going."

It's a powerful message from a band who have turned in an impressive opening statement: dysphoric, downtuned melodic metalcore that touches on the breakdown of relationships and depression.

"There's a lot of melancholic parts on the album," says drummer Sara Gacic. "On some of the songs you can hear where Maria was almost crying when we were recording it."

The Danish quartet's most recent single, *Not Who We Are*, tackles the subject of how medication can blunt and narrow emotional responses. "It's all about when you have got a diagnosis and you want to be medicated from it," says Maria quietly. "But you're never truly happy because the only happiness you feel is when you take some pills."

Ivy Crown's penchant for atmospheric, cold grooves bolstered by huge, emotive choruses has won themselves admirers in high places. "We started making this unrealistic list of people we wanted to have on the album, so we texted Oli Sykes…" laughs Sara. Did he reply?! "No! He's not invited to the Christmas party." Although the Bring Me The Horizon frontman didn't text back, three other vocalists did: Loathe's Kadeem France and fellow Danes Jesper Vicencio Gün from Ghost Iris and Møl's Kim Song Sternkopf all make guest appearances.

"Kim really got into the song [single *Lonesome And Cold*]," says Sara, recalling the experience, still somewhat incredulously. "He called Maria a few times to talk about the lyrics and the energy."

Roping in members of some of metal's buzziest bands is a real coup for any young act. Yet for Ivy Crown, the presence of their heroes only elevates their assured song writing to a higher level. "We've worked so hard making this album, took our time and put it out in our own terms," says Sara. "We want to be remembered for the music we make." H

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Arena-worthy, earworm choruses rising from melodic, melancholic riffery

FOR FANS OF:
Northlane, Polaris, Architects

LISTEN TO:
Not Who We Are

***ECHO* IS OUT NOW VIA LONGBRANCH/SPV**

BEWITCHER

Think metal needs to reclaim a bit of wildness? You're gonna *love* these guys

WORDS: ALEX DELLER

IF YOU'RE LOOKING for a modern-day metal band making sacrifices to old gods such as Venom, Motörhead and Bathory, look no further than Bewitcher – a band who know it's not just the riffs you write but the fire with which you play them.

"Metal has become safe and sanitised over the past couple of decades and our goal is to make wild, untamed music to lose your inhibitions to," explains guitarist/vocalist Mateo Von Bewitcher. "Heavy metal in the 80s had a spirit of rebellion and attitude that's only recently begun to make a comeback, and we're proud to be ambassadors for it with our speed metal sorcery."

'Sorcery' just about sums up second album *Under The Witching Cross*, which summons the sound of their heroes but also the *spirit*.

"Back then, bands knew how create music that took you for a ride," says Mateo. "Whether you're talking about Judas Priest, Mercyful Fate or Thin Lizzy, they all knew how to use dynamics and mood shifts to create this powerful, magical experience for the listener. If we can harness even just a little bit of that same energy to achieve a similar end, then we've done our job."

If the band want to take you on a manic ride musically, then Mateo's malevolent lyrics serve a similar purpose. Do such dark conjurations offer the frontman a way of sidestepping the terrifying nature of modern life?

"The world has always been fucked up," he says. "Art and music can provide escapism, but for me it's all woven together – the world around you will always influence what you do to some degree. But the point of magick is to use your will to manipulate and influence the world around you, so I see it as a way to exist within rather than escape from reality." H

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
The patches on an 80s battle jacket in human form

FOR FANS OF:
Bathory, Mantar, Venom

LISTEN TO:
Hexenkrieg

***UNDER THE WITCHING CROSS* IS OUT NOW VIA SHADOW KINGDOM**

IVY CROWN: PRESS. BEWITCHER: PRESS.

THROES

Loud caveman hardcore from the label that brought us Conjurer? Yes!

WORDS: MATT MILLS

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Blackened, sludgy hardcore with enough dirt under its nails to cultivate an ant farm

FOR FANS OF:
Conjurer, Cult Leader, Sulaco

LISTEN TO:
They Never Spoke

"WE MAKE LOUD caveman music," laughs Throes bassist Bryce Kresge. He isn't wrong. On their debut album, *In the Hands of An Angry God*, the sludge metal/hardcore quintet peddle the most dissonant, depressive and – most importantly – fucking heavy tunes. The whirring guitars of extreme punk are omnipresent, grinding away against a backdrop of primal metallic grooves and no-nonsense growls. Put simply, *…Angry God* is a mid-paced yet jarring assault on the senses, symptomatic of a soundscape that its creators have already spent years perfecting.

Throes formed in 2013 out of the ashes of snot-nosed Idaho-based punks Bone Dance. While that earlier venture was a more technical, fast-paced affair, this fresh start was intentionally devised to be slower and unnerving.

Bryce remembers, "On the first song we started writing as Throes, we had a couple riffs bouncing around and someone threw up the idea of, 'Let's play half as fast and see how it sounds.' It developed naturally from there."

Channelling the gritty harshness of their Idaho desert homeland in aural form, Throes announced their arrival with their *To Dust* EP. Thereafter, their despondent sound drew the ears of Holy Roar Records, who fell for the raging nihilists and added them to their roster.

With one of Britain's best labels behind them – and supremely heavy, hardcore-tinged acts like Conjurer and Venom Prison being all the rage – Throes are destined to be a force to be reckoned with. You can find your blasted eardrums in row Z.

***IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY GOD* IS OUT NOW VIA HOLY ROAR**

ERADIKATOR

Brummie thrashers take the genre as far as it'll go… and you won't believe what happened next

WORDS: DAVE LING

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Thoughtful, intelligently arranged classic metal from a band with something to say.

FOR FANS OF:
Mastodon, Gojira, Metallica

LISTEN TO:
Nightmare Dawning

"UM… YEAH, WE discussed changing that at a recent band practice and never got around to it." Andy MacNevin is embarrassed. Hammer has reminded the guitarist that the Facebook page for Eradikator boasts of his band being "dedicated to making the most crushing heavy metal possible – music to make the world collapse under its sheer power, causing the next mass extinction."

This mission statement dates back to the Brummie quartet's debut, *Dystopia*. Seven years and two albums later, however, their music contains little of the old-school velocity with which they made their name. The conceptual *Obscura* has more in common with Mastodon than Megadeth. Have Eradikator outgrown thrash?

"I guess you might say that, but it would be more truthful to say we had taken thrash as far as we could," explains Andy. "This time we focused more on the songwriting than whether or not a song was fast."

Following such a sea change, Eradikator have mild worries about losing fans.

"Some might be a bit alienated but I believe that we made two pretty strong albums in that style, so diehards can stick with those," Andy states. "But of course we hope to pick up fans that didn't like us or know of us before!" If you didn't know of them before, you will soon enough.

***OBSCURA* IS OUT NOW VIA DIVEBOMB**

IN THE KNOW

What your favourite bands are listening to

UNPROCESSED

"THIS GERMAN METAL quintet push the boundaries of technical musicianship, but they have also mastered the art of creative songwriting. Imagine the elegant melodies and structures of The Contortionist combined with the inventiveness and virtuosity of Animals As Leaders, performed by musicians on musical steroids. Stunning stuff."

JAMES MONTEITH, TESSERACT

THROES: PRESS. ERADIKATOR: PRESS.
UNPROCESSED: PRESS. JAMES MONTEITH: PRESS/STEVE BROWN.

HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month

SAXON

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THE RAFT OF reissues and anthologies that Saxon have put out over the past few years have been but preludes to the Barnsley NWOBHM legends' 40th anniversary that they're celebrating this year. Currently on their commemorative Castles & Eagles tour, which hits the UK next month, the band are also marking the occasion with this stunning box set. Featuring the requisite 40 live songs across all four decades and numerous locations, this top-of-the-range edition spreads them across five 180g vinyl discs. Housed in an elegant box, they share space with 23 plectrums featuring artwork from every studio album plus this box set, as well as Biff Byford's original handwritten lyric sheet for 747 *(Strangers In The Night)*, numbered and autographed by the man himself, a replica tour pass, slipmat and an exclusive 40-page book. It's limited to 747 copies, so be quick!

https://saxon747live.com

METALLICA JIGSAW

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If you find yourself wondering, "My Metallica collection's just missing that special something," dream no more: here's a 500-piece jigsaw lovingly devoted to the legends' 1983 debut, *Kill 'Em All*. Perfect for Metallicaaaa! Familehhhhh! holidays.

http://tinyurl.com/metallica-jigsaw

HOLY ROAR T-SHIRT

£14.99

Presuming you're not one of the 92,000 Conservative Party members who elected Boris Johnson as UK Prime Minister, or you just had a drastic change of heart, you can still stage a dirty protest via this, er, eye-catching Holy Roar number.

http://tinyurl.com/fuck-boris

MIDDLE-EARTH MAP SCARF

£16.99

For Gondor, drape Middle-Earth 'round thy neck! Sure, Frodo et al could've probably done with Google Maps or something, but then you might not have all that extra footage of Merry and Pippin fucking around in the woods.

http://tinyurl.com/adorn-yourself

SKULL BLAST HEAT-CHANGE MUG

£14.99

Drinking the liquid equivalent of Five Finger Death Punch has become a reality thanks to this heat-sensitive mug, turning a regular skull into a fiery, hellish visage. Simply fill with your warm beverage of choice and don camo before drinking.

http://tinyurl.com/skull-heatmug

OPETH BOX SET

£63.50

Opeth's new masterpiece, *In Cauda Venenum*, is upon us, but get the full works with this senses-shattering box set containing the English and Swedish versions in stone-effect vinyl, CD and audio Blu-ray versions, plus poster and certificate.

http://tinyurl.com/opeth-boxset

THE GREAT OLD ONES COSMICISM DIGIBOX

£45.30

These black metallers have always trumpeted their love for H.P. Lovecraft's cosmic horrors, and with this ultra-limited edition of their *Cosmicism* album they offer you your very own Cthulhu figurine to take home and cherish.

http://tinyurl.com/tgoo-box

SKELE-GRO BOTTLE

£19.99

Better suited to hydration at work than Quidditch- or moshpit-related injuries, this replica Skele-Gro bottle looks cool nonetheless. Own a piece of Harry Potter history – just don't let Kenneth Branagh anywhere near it.

http://tinyurl.com/potter-bottle

MARVEL POP! ADVENT CALENDAR

£49.99

Xmas is coming, the goose is getting fat. Tony Stark is dead, what d'you think of that? Treat the Marvel fan in your life to 24 mini figurines with this limited-edition calendar. Excelsior!

http://tinyurl.com/marvel-advent

H.P. LOVECRAFT BOBBLEHEAD

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Fancy having H.P. Lovecraft glaring down from atop accursed mantle? Then snag one of these tentacle-sheathed bobbleheads before they vanish into the cosmic void (aka eBay). Wouldn't he look lovely nestled next to your Great Old Ones Cthulhu figurine?

http://tinyurl.com/hp-bobble

ASAGRAUM T-SHIRT BUNDLE

£32

Netherlands' Asagraum are about to cement their black metal superiority with their second album, *Dawn Of Infinite Fire*. Show your true lack of colours by getting hold of this vinyl/subtly crustacean-logo t-shirt bundle!

https://tinyurl.com/asagraum-bundle

DEMOGORGON LARVAE

£9.99

Clearly priced because it's £6.66 upside down, these unformed offspring from *Stranger Things*' big bad monster aren't only every bit as tasty as the ectoplasm they're steeped in, they come in their own, on-brand inverted jar.

http://tinyurl.com/stranger-larvae

GOST T-SHIRT

£16.30

There can't be many acts who bring together lager-swilling moshpit-dwellers with pill-chomping ravers, but GosT somehow manage it. Let this ghoulish, skull-bedecked shirt be the uniform to unite the tribes!

http://tinyurl.com/gost-tee

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As Babymetal return with a new album and a tweaked line-up, we find out why they're shooting for the stars

GALAXY

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN • PICTURES: STEVE BROWN

QUEST

Su-metal and Moametal stand side-by-side, their capes expertly draped around them by their stylists. They look regal, like the queens of a planet we're not cool enough to know about. It's a hot July afternoon, and we're shooting Babymetal backstage at London's Brixton Academy, where they're playing later.

Though it's been eight months since Yuimetal announced she was leaving to pursue a solo career, it's still strange seeing them as a duo. Their management are at pains to ensure they appear together in pictures and are presented as elegant, rather than as superheroes or a novelty act. It's clear this is a new dawn for these kawaii-metal pioneers.

It's remarkable they're so poised, given their insanely busy schedule. Three days ago, they finished their first performances of 2019 – a pair of shows at the 17,000-capacity Yokohama Arena under the banner 'Babymetal Awakens – The Sun Also Rises'. They were joined by a stand-in dancer on each night – more on that later. Then they hopped straight on a plane to England to entertain a curious Glastonbury crowd, playing before Bring Me The Horizon and bagging a selfie with stagemate/American pop idol Billie Eilish.

"We had to fly the night of that arena show in Japan, and we got into Glastonbury on the day of the festival, so everything just seems like a blur," confesses Moametal. "It seems like a dream still. Babymetal are a heavier band compared to the other artists at Glastonbury. I feel like we were able to perform a new style to a pop-based crowd, who we've never had to perform in front of, so everything was new."

Tonight at Brixton, they're back with their home team, as hordes of fans dressed in newly purchased Fox God t-shirts assemble. They punch the air and chant as the girls take the stage shrouded in darkness. Then comes the familiar, videogames-on-E-numbers starburst of *Megitsune*, tonight's substitute member 'Rihometal' keeping pace with the high-kicks and kitsune ears like a stage-school pro. Next up is peppy single *Elevator Girl*, and the surprising, Bollywood-tinged *Shanti Shanti Shanti*. *Starlight* and *Syncopation* get their first airings outside Japan, while *PA PA YA!!* explodes like juice from crushed fruit. The audience, it's safe to say, are satiated with fun.

Afterwards, we congratulate Su-metal and Moametal. They're in high spirits, despite the hours they've put in. As we've previously noted, their work ethic is unbeatable.

"Since I was very small, I just absolutely loved to sing, and that's been the biggest drive to my work ethic," explains Su-metal. "Every time I perform, I appreciate the fact I'm able to do what I love the most. And although it's the same songs, there are different kinds of reactions with the crowd, so that change has always been a really fun factor in my performance."

They'll fly back to Japan in two days, on Moametal's 20th birthday. When *Metal Hammer* ran our first cover feature with Babymetal in 2015, Moametal was just 16 and Su-metal was 17. A lot has changed for them in these formative years. They're no longer cramming in homework between rehearsals, and tonight look more assured onstage than ever, with the experience of countless international shows under their black, snakeskin belts. With Yui gone, they're entering another era for Babymetal, and third record *Metal Galaxy* is set to take them around the globe again. But can they survive this brave new world, and will this be the album that takes them truly stratospheric?

Two months later, we catch up with them via Skype video. By now, we know the drill when it comes to Babymetal. Following the example of Japanese idol groups, Kobametal is their manager while Moametal and Su-metal realise his creative vision, and the Kami Band and songwriters remain anonymous. Their management company, Amuse, ask us to submit the questions prior to the interview. This isn't the normal way of doing things.

The girls sit in a meeting room in front of a laptop, sporting t-shirts rather than fancy costumes, with a label rep/interpretor next to them. We're excited to chat, but every time we ask a question, they read a pre-prepared answer from a sheet of paper. If we ask anything that's not in the script, they look worried and confused, or tell us to direct the question to Kobametal. It's a surreal scenario, like being an accidental actor in a weird metal play.

But they seem to be having fun, and laugh a lot. When asked – off script – what the most difficult part of touring is, Moametal deadpans: "My suitcase is just packed, it's too full at the end of the

Su-metal: living the dream

tour. A lot of things accumulate, and trying to fit everything in is the most difficult part of touring." Su-metal bursts into giggles.

We talk about a little about Yuimetal. She was missing from the line-up when Babymetal began their 2018 tour last May. In October, she released a statement declaring she was leaving the band, recovering from illness and would one day go solo: "Although I thought over and over, I decided to leave Babymetal" she said. "There was also a strong desire to stand onstage once again, but there is also a feeling that I am still not in perfect condition now, and I want to advance towards my dreams as Yui Mizuno." We haven't heard from her since. It's likely the girls have been asked not to reveal too much about the subject, but they do say they've kept in touch.

"We've been together for a long time; Yuimetal is like a family member to this group," says Su-metal. "Although she has left, we'll continue to support her and hope that she can pursue what she'd like to do in the future."

Babymetal's future lies in *Metal Galaxy*. It's a wildly innovative record, taking the high-tempo template of 2014's self-titled record and 2016's *Metal Resistance*, and fusing it with disparate sounds from around the world. *Elevator Girl*'s languid jazz bleeds into the Indian instrumentation of *Shanti Shanti Shanti*, which bumps up against Sabaton frontman Joakim Brodén's gruff growls on the folky *Oh! MAJINAI*. Other guest stars include Arch Enemy's own Alissa White-Gluz and Thai rapper F. Hero (*PA PA YA!!*).

It's consistent with Babymetal's modus operandi – moulding things together that usually wouldn't work, to create something striking. It's why Kobametal formed Babymetal.

"Before Babymetal started, I had been a metal fan myself, and I wanted a challenge," he explains, also talking to us via an interpretor. "The name 'Babymetal' came from me wanting to give birth to a new type of metal. I wanted to pay respect to the type of metal music that I've grown up with, but create a new evolution of metal, and that's been the theme ever since."

He explains that through Babymetal, he's been able to visit different territories – Japan, The US and the UK are still their biggest markets, but they've hit Germany, Singapore, Netherlands, France, Australia, Austria, Taiwan, Switzerland, Canada, Mexico, South Korea, Italy and Indonesia. The travelling allowed him to hear diverse types of music, and he wanted to incorporate that range into Babymetal. The 'Metal Galaxy,' in all its multicultural glory, is a conceit to explore this idea.

"That has been *Metal Galaxy*'s main concept. Metal has different types of sounds within even the genre, different countries illustrate metal in different ways, and even non-metal genres like Latin music and so on," he says. "I saw all of these different types of sounds as stars in the sky. I see Babymetal as

"YUIMETAL IS LIKE A FAMILY MEMBER AND WE WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPORT HER"

SU-METAL

SPACE CADETS

Joakim and Alissa explain how they ended up doing guest vocals on Metal Galaxy

JOAKIM BRODÉN SABATON

What was it like playing Babymetal's Dark Night Carnival festival in Japan last year?
Joakim: "It was a lot of fun. My standout moment was when they introduced me by raising me with a pyro bazooka from under the stage, before I joined them for one song. Being onstage is good... being onstage with a bazooka is better!"

How did you react when Babymetal approached you about being on *Oh! MAJINAI*?
Joakim: "I was surprised they wanted me to join them, but why the hell not! We've met at festivals a few times over the years, and they are good people and put on a good show."

What was it like being in the studio?
Joakim: "We recorded my parts in Osaka during the short tour we did with them. It was just me, the engineers and producer."

What did you bring to the song?
Joakim: "I went a bit harder vocally than I normally would – some takes are borderline growling – but they seemed to like it, so we tested a few different things in the studio, which is always nice."

What would you say Sabaton and Babymetal have in common?
Joakim: "Sexy drummers."

ALISSA WHITE-GLUZ ARCH ENEMY

When did you first hear about Babymetal?
Alissa: "I heard about them through [Arch Enemy guitarist] Michael Amott about eight years ago, because he spends quite a bit of time in Japan. All of us in Arch Enemy have a strong love affair with Japan, and we have an amazing time whenever we go there."

How did you end up guesting on their track *Distortion*?
Alissa: "Arch Enemy as a band already knew them and had a good relationship with them, so I wish it was more exciting, but they just asked if I wanted to take part and I said yes. I always listen to a song before confirming to work with anybody, so I listened and it sounded pretty cool so I agreed. They gave me really detailed information about how they were picturing everything, so I did my best to meet their expectations and they liked it."

What was different about *Distortion* that attracted your attention?
Alissa: "If you really analyse it, a lot of the songwriting sounds quite similar to the way Arch Enemy approach songs. Their final product sounds very different in the end and the production is different, but from a guitar point of view, it's not that far off."

ALISSA INTERVIEW: ALI COOPER

Love 'em or hate 'em, you can't deny Babymetal put on one helluva show

a sort of spaceship that's travelling through these metal galaxies and exploring different types of sounds."

Kobametal's always been savvy when it comes to metal's heritage and landscape, and he's aware of what we often refer to as 'global metal' – music from outside Europe and North America – as well as world music in general. Last year in the States, Babymetal were supported by Indian progressive metal band Skyharbor ("their sound is very unique and cool"), and this year they'll be supported by horsehead-fiddle-toting Mongolians The Hu. He sees them as part of the same scene, and it's something he's excited about sharing with the band's army of Kitsunes.

"Yes, I do feel that I'm a part of that community, and that metal itself has a very unique aspect, more so than pop music. In different countries they have their local native sound and a cross between that as well as metal music," he says. "I want to search for new music in that aspect, but also inspire fans to listen to different songs."

To kickstart the writing process for *Metal Galaxy*, he got all the songwriters together in a room to discuss what sort of music they wanted to explore ("which is why it took three-and-a-half years!" he jokes). They brought in rhythms from Cuba, tribal music from South America and metal from Scandinavia. The Latin-inflected *Night Night Burn!* was started around six years ago, at the same time as *Megitsune*, but others are brand new. He refers to uplifting closing tracks *Starlight, Shine* and *Arkadia* as "a trilogy of lights".

"The light to me represents an aspect of duality, and in Babymetal the main colours are red and black – there's light and darkness," he says of the trilogy's theme. "Both are necessary; we can't just live with light, there's always darkness. I wanted to kind of illustrate that in an abstract way, in that different people experience music in different ways, and I wanted to show that with the music that I've created with the third album."

"IT'S IMPORTANT FOR THE NEW GENERATION TO CONTINUE THE METAL SPIRIT"

KOBAMETAL

Su-metal says she gets a vivid image in her mind when she hears *Starlight*: "Every time I sing this song, it reminds me of my travels to New Zealand, and the starry nights and 180° of star lights," she says. "It was a vast amount of small lights I can never forget."

'Global metal' is a contentious term, which could imply those bands are somehow separate from, or even worse, inferior to the rest of the genre. It's even weirder when you're discussing it with a Japanese band, who geographically, but not commercially or logistically, fall into that category. They have the clout to give bands such as The Hu a platform, but are stoked to have Swede Joakim on their album.

But as the world becomes more connected, there is a sense that increasing numbers of 'global metal' bands are breaking through. Kobametal denies he's jumping on a bandwagon, and is keen to point out how much he just loves metal – especially bands that can alchemise it into original, shining forms.

"I've never consciously thought about trends or things of that sort, but with Babymetal I've had many opportunities to explore different rock scenes, such as bands like Bring Me The Horizon – their last album is very experimental," he explains. "So from the outside world, it may seem like there's a trend or a movement, but as Babymetal, we're not trying to get on that trend, it just simultaneously happened. It was very interesting that Bring Me The Horizon, during Glastonbury, had dancers onstage. Maybe they actually have Babymetal in their sights."

He chuckles. A few days after this interview, Bring Me The Horizon will play before Babymetal headline the second stage at Japan's Summer Sonic festival. Oli Sykes will say: "We're just here to warm you up. We're here for the

Moametal: oversized suitcase just out of shot

Fox God!" Babymetal have long taken a pic'n'mix approach to homaging metal and pop culture, but it's super-odd and brilliant to hear *Metal Galaxy*'s opening track, *Future Metal*. A robotic voice states: *'This ain't heavy metal, welcome to the world of Babymetal,'* followed by an electronic flurry. It's an obvious twist on BMTH's song *Heavy Metal* from this year's *Amo* record.

"Yeah, maybe, but what I really value the most is the metal masters, the different famous bands that have carried on metal music throughout the generations," he says. "I feel that it's important for these new generation bands, like Babymetal or Bring Me The Horizon, to succeed the metal spirit and try and continue that tradition. But at the same time, the evolution of metal music is very interesting, and I hope that I can create an evolution in metal in that way. Maybe Sheffield is one of the stars in the metal galaxy!"

Yui's departure could have caused Babymetal to crashland, but Su-metal and Moametal seem content enough inside their metaphorical spacecraft, chatting enthusiastically about *Metal Galaxy*. Captain Kobametal admits he was concerned about the girls losing a shipmate, but is confident they're in it for the long haul.

"Yeah, obviously I was worried about them, but at the same time I respect each member, and both of them have become adults, and each of them are continuing Babymetal because they want to, and I definitely appreciate that," he explains. "Because there's a sort of trust between this group. Obviously I'm worried, but I just trust that they want to do it."

He remembers auditioning for his Babymetal crew almost *10 years* ago, when the girls were involved with singing and modelling. He immediately knew Su-metal, Moametal and Yuimetal were a winning combination.

"When I first heard Su-metal sing, there's not that many singers that sing the way she does, it was very direct to me," he remembers. "Metal bands don't usually have any dance aspect, so I thought it would be interesting to add that to the new future of metal, hence I selected Yuimetal and Moametal to be the twin factor in the choreography."

Over the last nine months, they've all had to adjust to a new dynamic. At Download festival last year, there were *four* members onstage, adding new level of animation to their madcap jumps, spins and hand gestures. This year they've settled back into their triangle formation, with the vacant position filled by one of three trained-up, rotating members: the Avengers. They introduced the concept at those Yokohama shows before Glastonbury, via a message on the big screen.

"It was Metal Resistance Episode VIII, and the beginning of the new Babymetal," explains Kobametal. "On top of Su-metal and Moametal, their supporting Avengers are the chosen dancers that the Fox God had summoned, and that was the main theme of these shows. And who will be chosen is only something the Fox God knows…" Funnily enough, our question about whether Babymetal will ever ▷

Even line-up changes, cynical critics and off-script questions can't stop them

get a permanent third member is also directed to the vulpine ruler.

One of the new countries Babymetal have visited is Mexico, and Kobametal talks passionately about watching Lucha Libre wrestling there. When we ask whether he'll ever introduce it into Babymetal, he explains that wrestling theatrics have been there all along. And suddenly, it's obvious.

"It's already in it," he explains. "The wrestling part of it is reflected in the storyline. There's dramatic storylines where the chosen dancers come out, and in the past we had the Chosen Seven, or the dark themes."

Ah yes, the Chosen Seven, the confusing concept of Episode VII that was played out in videos and onstage. Between their visuals, merchandise and marketing, the amount of creative planning that goes into the band is phenomenal. Kobametal wants to expand on last year's comicbook project, *Apocrypha: The Legend Of Babymetal*. Are there any other offshoots in the works? "Maybe apparel," he answers – presumably an expansion of the premium athleisure brand BMD Fox Apparel. Can you tell us any more about that? "I hope to reveal more in the near future," he says cryptically.

This constant level of secrecy ensures an air of mystery remains around the band and keeps the fans guessing, allowing them to fantasise about their own wishes for Babymetal. When we ask Kobametal if Su-metal and Moametal will ever be able to talk about their background or personal lives, he again draws on metal's canon to support his tactics. "It's similar to the band Ghost – it's all through the storyline of the concept of the band," he replies.

But Ghost mastermind Tobias Forge broke character a couple of years back. Will that ever happen for Babymetal? "Only the Fox God knows…"

Metal Galaxy will certainly propel them onwards. Having landed in the UK and gone straight to Sonisphere's main stage, followed by landmark sets at the likes of Download and Wembley, they're finally embarking on their first UK tour. Beyond those four dates, Kobametal wants to plant their red-and-black flag in even more locations. He has faith that Babymetal 2.0 are ready to go.

"The girls have really expanded their strengths and experienced so many different performances over the course of almost 10 years, that they've become stronger mentally and physically," Kobametal says. "I also feel that the way the girls view Babymetal has

"I SEE BABYMETAL AS A SPACESHIP THAT'S TRAVELLING THROUGH METAL GALAXIES"

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Will Babymetal succeed as the future of metal? Only the Fox God knows...

"BABYMETAL AT THE GRAMMYS? THAT'S A DREAM, IT'D BE AMAZING"

SU-METAL

really resonated within them, and they're now leading the way, discussing the future of Babymetal and how they want to envision and go through these next, coming tours."

Babymetal feel like they've changed, too. "My height and my looks have probably changed. I think other people can tell I've matured. But I feel that my heart and way of thinking have changed over the past few years," says Moametal. "Every performance I want to give it my best, and I never want to forget the fact that I'm very lucky to be doing what I'm doing, and to appreciate the people around me, supporting me."

We ask them about their ambitions. Would they ever want to represent Japan at the Grammys? They laugh. "Until you mentioned the Grammys, I hadn't really thought about it, to be quite honest," says Su-metal. But that is definitely a dream, and it would be amazing if we were able to fulfil that."

What other dreams do you have for Babymetal? "We want to be the future of metal music," says Su-metal.

She didn't read that line from a piece of paper, so we're inclined to believe her. Grab the spacesuits, oxygen tanks and freeze-dried papaya – we're coming along for the ride.

***METAL GALAXY* IS OUT OCTOBER 11 VIA EARMUSIC. THEY TOUR THE UK IN FEBRUARY. SEE P.109**

"BABYMETAL IS BECOMING A GENRE"

Ryosuke Arakane is a rock/metal critic in Japan, while Daishi Ato covers the rock and idol scene. We asked them how Babymetal are doing back home

How popular are Babymetal in Japan these days?
Ryosuke: "Babymetal are still popular and are expanding their fanbase. A few years ago, I saw many metalheads wearing Metallica t-shirts come to the shows, but now the majority of the audience are wearing Babymetal t-shirts. Their fans are also increasing in the popular music scene in Japan."

Do they fit in best with the idol scene or the metal scene now?
Daishi: "When they started, only the metal fans and the idol fans got crazy about their music. But, after they played number of shows in Japan in 2016 and 2017, many domestic rock fans started to understand their music and loved it. I noticed at their show in Yokohama this year that their female fans were increasing, and they were not the metal fans nor the idol fans."
Ryosuke: "When they debuted, their music style was too new to understand – it confused some people. These days, Babymetal is becoming a genre itself. They performed with Rob Halford, and toured with Metallica, Guns N' Roses, Red Hot Chili Peppers and so on. Babymetal are the only ones who've managed to do such a big thing in Japan."

How have people reacted to Yuimetal leaving?
Daishi: "When someone leaves a group, it's always significant even for fans in Japan! Some people lost their interest in Babymetal because of that."
Ryosuke: "After Yuimetal's departure, some fans, who believed the group has to be 'the original three girls', left Babymetal. But Su-metal and Moametal are Babymetal now. Their performance is superb and we can see the girls' growth and determination as performers in their dancing and singing."

What do you think the future holds for them?
Daishi: "*Metal Galaxy* is a great album, and as you know, they are going on a huge world tour, which they've never experienced before. I believe their 'metal resistance' will be much more intense."
Ryosuke: "Babymetal sold out the Tokyo Dome on two consecutive nights with 110,000 people three years ago. Their fans are still increasing. Internationally, Babymetal have performed at numerous music festivals in Europe and America the last few years. Most of their headliners are the successful bands from the 80s and the 90s, and they will soon need some young blood to develop and become their festival headliners. I believe Babymetal will be one of them in a few years."

BOXOUT TRANSLATION: CHIZUKA KAKIZAWA

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The Orchard

Steel Panther (left to right): Lexxi Foxx, Michael Starr, Stix Zadinia, Satchel

THE ULTIMATE HEAVY METAL PUB QUIZ

★STARRING STEEL PANTHER

The glam metal wallies are about to release *Heavy Metal Rules*, but how much do they actually know about metal? We put them to the test

WORDS: ADAM REES • PICTURES: WILL IRELAND

More used to the debauched surroundings of the Sunset Strip and backstage dressing rooms, Steel Panther seem a little uncomfortable in a genteel London pub. Maybe it's because instead of listening to them boast of how great new album *Heavy Metal Rules* is, we're testing their rock credentials with a none-more-British pub quiz.

After explaining what exactly a pub quiz actually is – baffled bassist Lexxi Foxx seems to have no idea for the duration – we split the band into two teams. Five extra points are given for the best team name. With singer Michael Starr and drummer Stix Zadinia's name, Pussy Slammers, ("That's what we are, chuckle away") deemed too crude, they lose an early lead to guitarist Satchel and Lexxi: The Best Looking Guys In Steel Panther.

The scoring may seem haphazard, but give us a break for trying to control the band as they struggle with the quizmaster's Welsh accent, constantly try to look at each other's answers, and pelt one another with peanuts while a bemused Lexxi keeps asking, "How do we advance to the next round?"

With answer sheets and pens at the ready, Satchel issues a good luck message in the spirit of sportsmanship: "You guys are going down! We are so gonna win this. The losing team has to suck our dicks, right? Mind you, you'd probably do that even if you didn't lose."

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE ROUND

Instead of questions on Red Rum, Jane Austen and 70s sitcoms, we've kept this round all about heavy fucking metal.

1. In what year was Slayer's *Diabolus In Musica* released? Bonus point if you can name the month as well.

Stix: "Duh!"

Satchel: "Name their mothers? Kerry King's mother's name is Keri."

Pussy Slammers: "June 1996." ✘

Best Lookers: "October 1998." ✔

[Answer: June 1998]

2. Complete the lyric: 'Frantic tick…'

Stix: "That's a lyric? There's more?"

Satchel: "Are we co-writing this song?"

Stix: "I got it."

Michael: "How do you know?"

Stix: "How do you not know?"

Satchel: "I don't listen to that Celine Dion shit."

Pussy Slammers: "Suck my dick!" ✘

Best Lookers: "That's original. Frantic tick, tantric dick." ✘

[Answer: tick tick tick tick tick tock. From Frantic by Metallica]

Stix: "It should've been Frantic tick tick tick tock, suck my cock. I don't know what James Hetfield was thinking."

3. Which Iron Maiden album cover saw Eddie immortalised as a tree?

Lexxi: "These are ugly questions."

Stix: "I'm trying to think which album and which tree."

Satchel: "Which album were they *not* immortalised as a tree!?"

Stix: "Can we get a point if we get the tree?"

Satchel: "Number Of The Trees!"

Pussy Slammers: "Two Minutes To The Arboretum." ✘

Best Lookers: "Rhyme Of The Ancient Botanist." ✘

[Answer: Fear Of The Dark]

4. How many studio albums do Megadeth have? The closest answer gets the point.

Michael: "Well, there's Megadeth 1, Megadeth 1.2, Megadeth and Rats…"

Satchel: "Lexxi if you know any of these answers, please tell me!"

Lexxi: "There's nothing easy about these questions."

Pussy Slammers: "11." ✘

Best Lookers: "14" ✔

[Answer: 15]

5. Finish this equation: People = ?

Pussy Slammers: "Shit." ✔

Best Lookers: "Pussy." ✘

[Answer: Shit]

Satchel: "That's so negative."

6. According to the bopping Nightwish classic, what did Tarja Turunen wish she had more of?

Satchel: "According to the what, where, when?"

Michael: "Dick."

Satchel: "I don't know her that well but you know that's what she's thinking."

When in doubt, draw a massive cock 'n' balls...

Lexxi: "She's a singer for a reason. That's why we're in bands."

Pussy Slammers: "Pants." ✘

Best Lookers: "Dick." ✘

[Answer: Angels]

7. What was the name of actor Keanu Reeves' alt-rock band?

Stix: "Oh fuck, goddamnit what was it?"

Michael: "They were called The Matrix."

Pussy Slammers: "Dogstar." ✔

Best Lookers: "Dogstar." ✔

[Answer: Dogstar]

8. In what year did Download Festival begin? Extra two points if you can name the original two headliners.

Pussy Slammers: "2002. AC/DC and Iron Maiden." ✘

Best Lookers: "1983. Black Sabbath." ✘

[Answer: 2003, Iron Maiden and Audioslave, after Limp Bizkit pulled out]

9. What is Motörhead's highest chart position on the US Billboard 200? Closest answer gets the point.

Michael: "I don't even know what *our* highest Billboard chart position was."

Stix: "Ours is 26."

Pussy Slammers: "21." ✔

Best Lookers: "72." ✘

[Answer: 22 – 2013's Aftershock album]

> **"KERRY KING'S MOTHER'S NAME IS KERI"**
> SATCHEL

10. Name every guest musician that has appeared on the first four Steel Panther albums. A point for each.

Pussy Slammers: "Nuno Bettencourt, Chad Kroeger, Scott Ian, M. Shadows, Corey Taylor, Joe Lester, Matthew and Gunnar Nelson, Justin Hawkins, Vivian Campbell, Eden Blackman, Dane Cook, Rudy Sarzo and Brett Anderson." ✔✔✔ ✔✔✔✔✔✔✔✔✔✔

Best Lookers: "We got all those [11 of them] plus Barbara Streisand, Donald Trump, Andy Warhol, David Bowie and Barry Gibb." ✔✔✔✔✔✔✔✔✔✔

[Answer: You could've also had Rene Ruston, Heidi Murphy, Michael Catton, Michael Lord, Jay Ruston, Chris Catton, Allison Robertson]

TOTAL SCORE:

Pussy Slammers: 17

Best Lookers: 14

GLAM METAL ROUND

Not the best of starts, but we imagine a specialist round on 80s glam/hair metal should prove their chops. Right?

1. How many times is the word 'girls' used in Mötley Crüe's *Girls, Girls, Girls*?

Stix: "Once, over and over again. I fucking love that he [Michael Starr] is actually counting."

Pussy Slammers: "48." ✘

Best Lookers: "44." ✔

[Answer: 44]

Satchel: "Ha, suck our fucking dicks!"

Stix: "That's four too many girls."

2. What are Axl, Slash and Duff's birth names? Not all rock stars were born with their stage names.

Stix: "Well we were."

Pussy Slammers: "Saul Hudson Rosenberg, Bill Esquivel, Ronaldo." ✔

Best Lookers: "Saul, Tom Smith and Randy McKagan." ✔

[Answer: We'll accept William Bruce Rose Jr or Bill Bailey, Saul Hudson, Michael Andrew McKagan]

3. Which of the following wasn't a glam metal band: White Lion, White Jaguar, White Tiger?

Satchel: "I don't know what they are but they're probably all racist."

Lexxi: "Glass Tiger were metal."

Arguing with *Hammer* and taking the piss out of Welsh accents will lose you points, lads

Don't get cocky, Satchel, you're wrong!

Pussy Slammers: "White Jaguar." ✔
Best Lookers: "White Jaguar." ✔
[Answer: White Jaguar, a NWOBHM band.]

4. Which Whitesnake videos does Tawny Kitaen appear in?
Satchel: "Does that include the ones where she was naked?"
Stix: "No, not the home ones."
Pussy Slammers: "Three: *Here I Go, Is This Love?, Crying In The Rain*." ✔✔
Best Lookers: "Four: *Here I Go, Is This Love?, Still Of The Night, Crying In The Rain*." ✔✔✔
[Answer: Four. Still Of The Night, Here I Go Again, Is This Love?, The Deeper The Love]

5. Which music video do Tommy Lee and Nikki Sixx make cameos as police officers?
Pussy Slammers: "Ratt – *You're In Trouble*." ✘
Best Lookers: "It should have been *I Can't Drive 55* by Sammy Hagar." ✘
[Answer: Ratt – Back For More]

6. Which singer's first appearance on a song was *R2-D2 We Wish You A Merry Christmas* from *Christmas In The Stars: Star Wars Christmas Album*?
Michael: "[To *Hammer*] Well that's definitely something in your collection."
Satchel: "Lexxi, I'm just gonna give you the pen so you can answer the rest."
Pussy Slammers: "Bret Michaels." ✘
Best Lookers: "Kermit The Frog." ✘
[Answer: Jon Bon Jovi]

7. Despite being so high, what was the one thing Kip Winger didn't forget in 1988?
Satchel: "Taking out the trash."
Pussy Slammers: "Madeline." ✘
Best Lookers: "Going solo." ✘
[Answer: That she was a poison angel, trying to take his wings away]

8. The painting on Van Halen's *Fair Warning* is by a) William Kurelek b) Hans Hofmann c) Bruce Fairbairn?
Michael: "[Imitating *Hammer*'s accent] I do believe I read this in a book once."
Pussy Slammers: "Hans Hofmann." ✘
Best Lookers: "Bruce Fairbairn." ✘
[Answer: William Kurelek]
Michael: "Goddamn it. I genuinely did read the book though."

9. Which film features a cross-dressing child pole dancing to Warrant's *Cherry Pie*?
Stix: "Whatever it is, it's great."
Satchel: "How did I miss this one?"
Stix: "Kids pole dancing and cross dressing: got to be *Jurassic Park*, dude."
Michael: "*The Blob*? *Home Alone*?"
Pussy Slammers: "*Iron Man*." ✘
Best Lookers: "*Billy Madison*." ✘
[Answer: Jackass Presents Bad Grandpa]

10. Members of which two bands made guest appearances on LA Guns' second album, *Cocked & Loaded*?
Satchel: "Tony MacAlpine? Really, Lexxi? These guys don't even know who Tony MacAlpine is!" ✘
Pussy Slammers: "Donnie Dokken and Snake Sabo." ✘
Best Lookers: "Tony MacAlpine and Slash." ✘
[Answer: Cheap Trick and Ted Nugent]

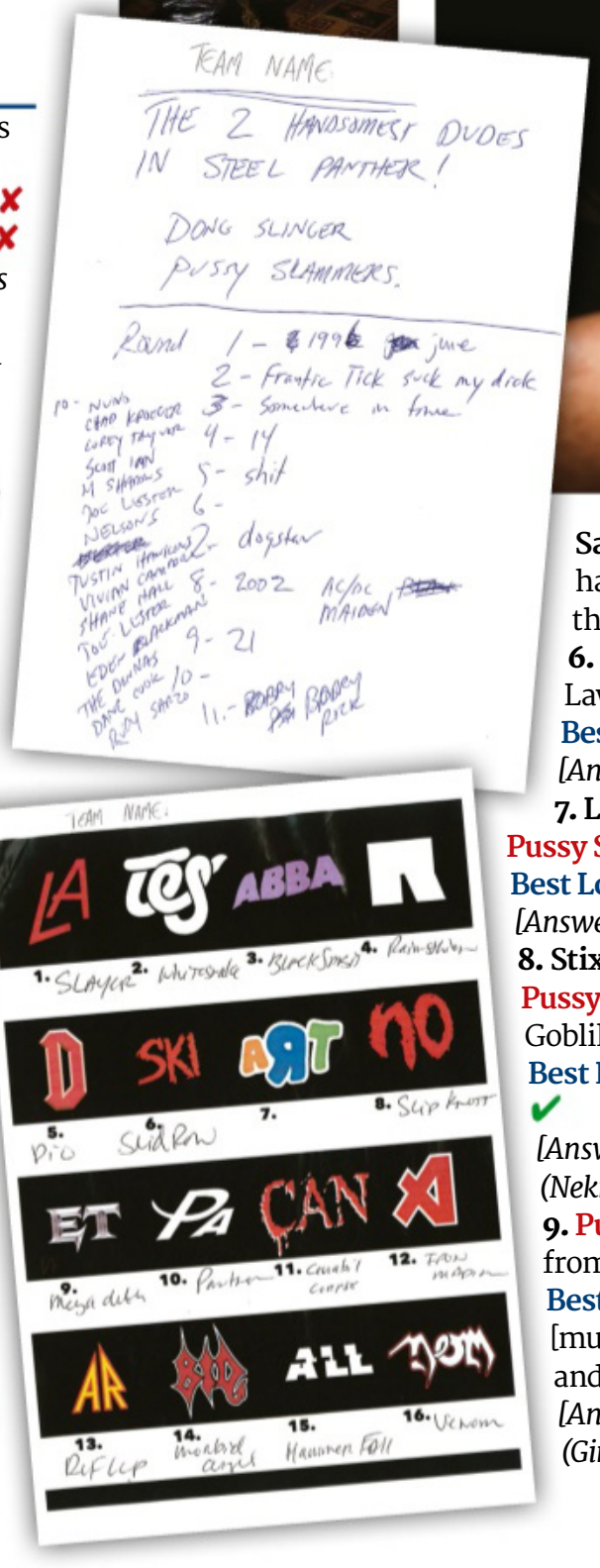
11. Guest question from Fozzy frontman and wrestling legend, Chris Jericho: Who was originally chosen to be the drummer for David Lee Roth's Eat 'Em And Smile before DLR nixed it?
Michael: "Bullshit."
Stix: "This is where I'm bummed that you write songs, letting me down."
Satchel: "You model your whole life on David Lee Roth."
Pussy Slammers: "Bobby Rock." ✘
Best Lookers: "Wrong. Tico Torres." ✘
[Answer: Roxy Petrucci Of Vixen. "I chose this question because I've always felt Stix would be a better drummer if he cut his cock off," says Chris Jericho. This is disputed, as research suggests Roxy only auditioned and lost out to Gregg Bissonette. There ▶

University Challenge it ain't

then follows anger from Satchel asking if any of this is right. So thanks, Chris.]
Michael: "Jericho's full of shit. He sucks dick like a bitch!"
TOTAL SCORE:
Pussy Slammers: 4
Best Lookers: 6½

FACES & LOGOS ROUNDS

A mugshot gallery and fragments of great, good and obscure logos.
1. Pussy Slammers: "Dimebag." ✘
Best Lookers: "James Hetfield." ✘
[Answer: Ron McGovney, Metallica's first bassist]
Stix: "Ron McGovney? You mean how to not get laid."
2. Pussy Slammers: "Kip Winger." ✘
Best Lookers: "Bobby Blotzer." ✘
[Answer: Phil Anselmo (glam era)]
Everyone: "Shut the fuck up!"
Michael: "That's amazing."
3. Lexxi: "Andy Biersack."
Pussy Slammers: "That's Lzzy Hale." ✔
Best Lookers: "Joan Jett." ✘
[Answer: Lzzy Hale]
4. Stix: "Who's the guy with the big dick? Peter Steele?"
Pussy Slammers: "David Lee Roth." ✘
Best Lookers: "Blas Elias [original drummer of glam metal band Slaughter]." ✘
[Answer: Buckethead (without his mask)]
Stix: "No wonder he wears a bucket."
5. Satchel: "James Hetfield."
Stix: "He looks Norwegian."
Pussy Slammers: "David Lee Roth." ✘
Best Lookers: "Chad Kroeger." ✘
[Answer: Gaahl]



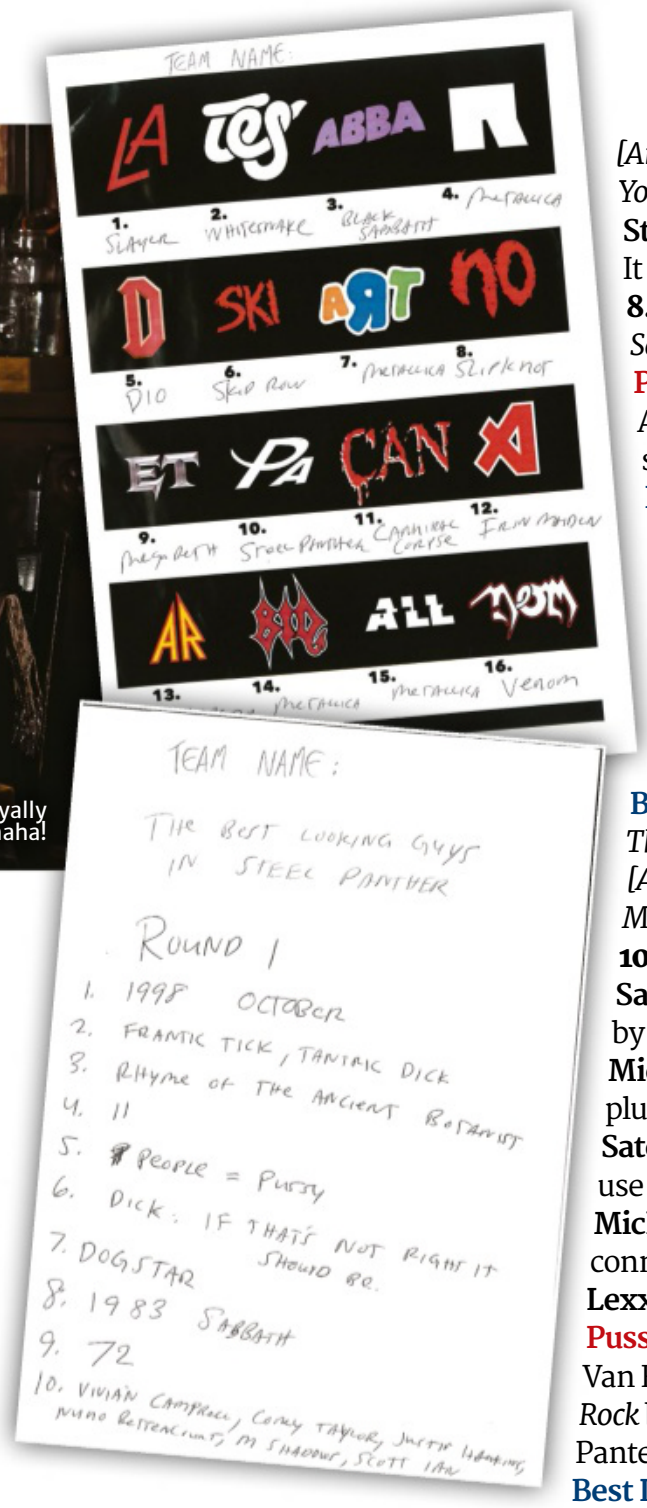
Satchel and Lexxi resist the urge to draw glasses and 'taches on everyone

Satchel: "You think I would have known that, I have their poster on my wall."
6. Pussy Slammers: "Blackie Lawless." ✔
Best Lookers: "Tom Keifer." ✘
[Answer: Blackie Lawless]
7. Lexxi: "Andy Biersack!"
Pussy Slammers: "Steve Vai." ✘
Best Lookers: "Andy Biersack." ✘
[Answer: Jered Threatin]
8. Stix: "It's you [*Hammer*], right?
Pussy Slammers: "John Goblikon." ✔
Best Lookers: "John Goblikon." ✔
[Answer: John Goblikon (Nekrogoblikon)]
9. Pussy Slammers: "Steve from Autograph." ✘
Best Lookers: "Jason Becker [musician, formerly Cacophony and David Lee Roth's band]." ✘
[Answer: Kim McAuliffe (Girlschool)]
10. Pussy Slammers: "An extra in *Sons Of Anarchy*." ✘
Best Lookers: "Rob Halford." ✘
[Answer: Paul Di'Anno (recent photo)]
Stix: "Blob Halfrod more like."
TOTAL SCORE:
Pussy Slammers: 3
Best Lookers: 1

LOGOS ROUND

1. Pussy Slammers: "Slayer." ✔
Best Lookers: "Slayer." ✔
[Answer: Slayer]
2. Pussy Slammers: "Whitesnake." ✔
Best Lookers: "Whitesnake." ✔
[Answer: Whitesnake]
3. Pussy Slammers: "Black Sabbath." ✔
Best Lookers: "Black Sabbath." ✔
[Answer: Black Sabbath]
4. Pussy Slammers: "Rammstein." ✔
Best Lookers: "Metallica." ✘
[Answer: Rammstein]
Lexxi: "Just say it right."
5. Pussy Slammers: "Dio." ✘
Best Lookers: "Dio." ✘

Stix and Michael: royally stumped. Mwahahaha!



[Answer: AC/DC]
6. Pussy Slammers: "Skid Row." ✔
Best Lookers: "Skid Row." ✔
[Answer: Skid Row]
7. Satchel: "Is that Toys R Us?"
Pussy Slammers: "Fart." ✘
Best Lookers: "Metallica." ✘
[Answer: Party Cannon]
8. Pussy Slammers: "Slipknot." ✔
Best Lookers: "Slipknot." ✔
[Answer: Slipknot]
9. Pussy Slammers: "Megadeth." ✔
Best Lookers: "Megadeth." ✔
[Answer: Megadeth]
10. Pussy Slammers: "Steel Panther." ✔
Best Lookers: "Steel Panther." ✔
[Answer: Steel Panther]
11. Pussy Slammers: "Cannibal Corpse." ✔
Best Lookers: "Cannibal Corpse." ✔
[Answer: Cannibal Corpse]
12. Pussy Slammers: "Iron Maiden." ✔
Best Lookers: "Iron Maiden." ✔
[Answer: Iron Maiden]
13. Pussy Slammers: "Def Leppard." ✔
Best Lookers: "Def Leppard." ✔
[Answer: Def Leppard]
14. Pussy Slammers: "Morbid Angel." ✔
Best Lookers: "Morbid Angel? Shit, we had Metallica again." ✘
[Answer: Morbid Angel]
15. Pussy Slammers: "HammerFall." ✘
Best Lookers: "We had Metallica again. Is that correct?" ✔
[Answer: Metallica]
Satchel: "I knew we'd get one right!"
16. Pussy Slammers: "Venom." ✔
Best Lookers: "Venom." ✔
[Answer: Venom]
TOTAL SCORE:
Pussy Slammers: 13
Best Lookers: 12

MUSIC CLIPS ROUND

Their eyes must be failing them after years of excess, but still with an ear for a tune, can they identify these intros?
1. Pussy Slammers: "Metallica – *Ain't My Bitch*." ✔
Best Lookers: "We just got Metallica." ✔
[Answer: Metallica – Ain't My Bitch]
2. Pussy Slammers: "We got Guns N' Roses, off *Chinese Democracy*, don't know the song." ✔
Best Lookers: "Guns N' Roses – *Chinese Democracy*." ✔
[Answer: Guns N' Roses – There Was A Time]
3. Pussy Slammers: "Sevendust." ✘
Best Lookers: "We got Europe – *The Final Countdown* off *The Final Countdown* record." ✘
[Answer: Spineshank – New Disease]
4. Pussy Slammers: "Megadeth." ✘
Best Lookers: "Sabaton." ✘
[Answer: Machine Head – Imperium]
Michael: "How the fuck didn't you know that one, Stix?"
5. Pussy Slammers: "Skrillex – *Bangerang*." ✔
Best Lookers: "Eminem." ✘
[Answer: Skrillex – Bangerang]
6. Satchel: "If that's not that I don't know what it is."
Pussy Slammers: "Evanescence – *Tacos For Brunch*." ✔
Best Lookers: "Evanescence." ✔
[Answer: Evanescence – Everybody's Fool]

"POLE-DANCING KIDS? IT'S GOT TO BE JURASSIC PARK!"
STIX ZADINIA

7. Satchel: "That's Bret Michaels."
Stix: "Are you guys OK? You have to write something down so we can verify you're not cheating."
Pussy Slammers: "Anthrax." ✔
Best Lookers: "White Tiger." ✘
[Answer: Anthrax – Fight 'Em Til You Can't]
Stix: "Wait, it's not White Tiger? It must be your speaker."
8. Satchel: "*Sabbath Bloody Sabbath... Hell's Bells...*"
Pussy Slammers: "We have Avenged Sevenfold, but no song." ✔
Best Lookers: "We have a song! *Rock You Like A Hurricane*." ✘
[Answer: Avenged Sevenfold – Shepherd Of Fire]
9. Satchel: "Now, *that's* Bret Michaels."
Pussy Slammers: "Poison." ✔
Best Lookers: "Eazy-E – *Fuck Tha Police*." ✘
[Answer: Poison – Shut Up, Make Love]
10. Stix: "Is that it?"
Satchel: "It's that R2-D2 song by Bon Jovi."
Michael: "Is your computer plugged in alright?"
Satchel: "Whatever it is I like the use of space."
Michael: "Check your Bluetooth connection."
Lexxi: "This is a trick question."
Pussy Slammers: "First we had Van Halen – *[And The] Cradle Will Rock* but then we changed it to Pantera – *Fucking Hostile*." ✘
Best Lookers: "Scorpions – *Rock You Like A Hurricane* again." ✘
[Answer: Napalm Death – You Suffer]
Stix: "Nobody would know that."
TOTAL SCORE:
Pussy Slammers: 4½
Best Lookers: 1½

FINAL SCORES

Pussy Slammers: 41 1/2
Best Lookers: 40

After a bruising contest where egos are as damaged as a Mötley Crüe hotel room, all four members drum their pens on the table as the scores are read out. Incredibly, Michael and Stix have overcome an early five-point deficit to triumph by the narrowest of margins, with the final music round being the turning point. Naturally, the winners are magnanimous while Satchel, who basically carried his team, is taking the defeat well...
Michael: "Baaaam, bitch! That's what I'm talking about!"
Satchel: "Great job on your dumb little fucking trivia questions." H

STEEL PANTHER'S NEW ALBUM, *HEAVY METAL RULES*, IS OUT SEPTEMBER 27 VIA STEEL PANTHER INC.

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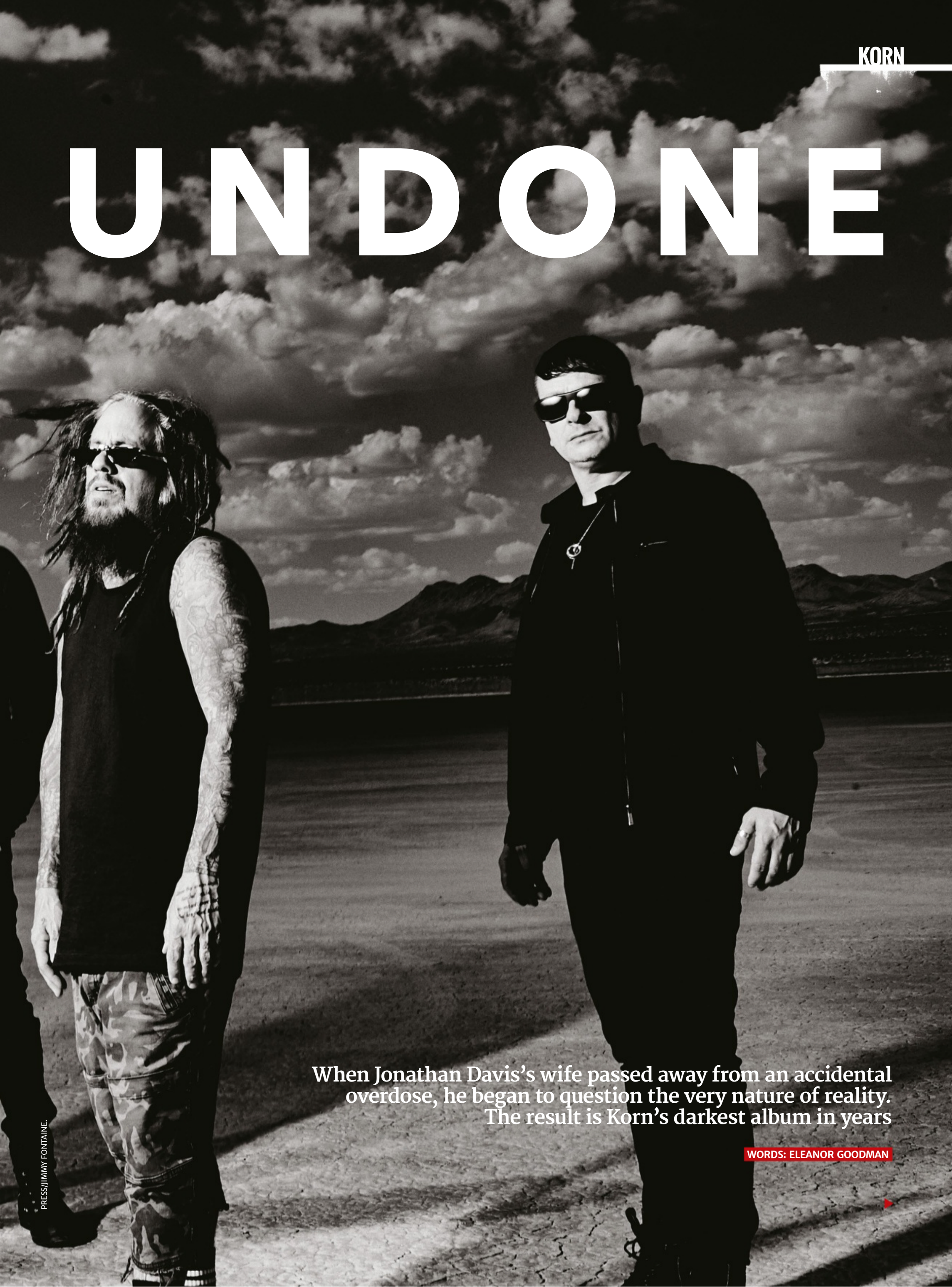

PRESS/JIMMY FONTAINE.

When Jonathan Davis's wife passed away from an accidental overdose, he began to question the very nature of reality. The result is Korn's darkest album in years

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN

Korn (left to right): Munky, Jonathan Davis, Ray Luzier, Fieldy, Head

"There are these dark energies that like to cause havoc and pain," Jonathan Davis explains matter-of-factly, staring at us across the table in a white-walled meeting room. "I've had to battle them my whole life."

This might sound like a cliché if we didn't know he'd just been through something horrific. As frontman of Korn, he's spent three decades writing down his darkest thoughts and singing them to millions, with great success. We're currently sitting in a hotel in London's exclusive Mayfair district – a real-life Monopoly property – during a press day for Korn's forthcoming 13th album, *The Nothing*. Previous record *The Serenity Of Suffering*, released in 2016, saw them play Wembley Arena and shoot up the billing of US festivals. Last summer, Jonathan released an accomplished and critically acclaimed solo album, *Black Labyrinth*.

Yet the second half of 2018 was particularly tough for Jonathan. His mother passed away. Two months later, he lost his wife, Deven, to an accidental overdose of illegal and prescription drugs, following years of mental health difficulties. As soon as we listen to *The Nothing*, we can hear these events relived, raged about and reflected upon. It is a genuinely hard listen.

So when his press officer emails to make it clear that Jonathan 'will not talk about his wife or anything related to that situation', it's difficult to understand how he'll be able to speak about the record at all. But it's also understandable; just because he's written about it, it doesn't mean he wants to repeatedly rehash his misery. There's a difference between describing your pain to a journalist, and recording or performing on your own terms.

We prepare some general questions about his new music and other subjects, and walk in without knowing what his emotional state will be like. He shakes our hand, smiles generously, and we chat about the joy of his achievements as comfortably as we did at Download last year. And yet within five minutes, the words begin tumbling out of him.

"When Deven died, they just kicked in really hard," he says of those dark energies that have always plagued him, his voice cracking as he covers his mouth with his hand. "I wanted to go and do things that I haven't done in years – it wanted me to drink, it wanted me to do all kinds of stuff, but I had to battle all that shit. And it was *fucked up*. It's so crazy to have someone in your life, your whole life – we've been together 20 years – not be there anymore. And even before that, the 20 years we were together, it was hell, because she was so sick. And I just think, it's all dark energy fucking with everything."

He is explaining the concept behind *The Nothing*. Over the last year or so, he has come to the conclusion that there is an amount of dark energy in the world, and an equal amount of light energy. There is also a place where they're perfectly balanced, which he's named 'The Nothing', after the mysterious force in 1984 children's movie *The NeverEnding Story*. He believes the universe maintains a cosmic equilibrium of these dark and light energies, so that if you do good deeds, an equal quantity of bad fortune will befall you.

"I felt like I was constantly being hounded and fucked with my whole life because of all the good I've done in the world," he explains. "There's a lyric in the record where I say: *'For every good thing I've done there's a price to pay, and the price has left me horrified'* [album closer *Surrender To Failure*]. And the record is just me dealing with that."

What would you say are the good things you've done in your life?

"It's like, how many kids I have helped from fucking themselves up, because of our music – just the positive thing that Korn has done in the world. I consider myself a really nice person, I'm not an evil guy, I don't wish harm on anyone."

Do you feel your life would have less darkness if you hadn't done Korn?

"Probably." He pauses, his face the equivalent of a shrug. "Just being honest! Probably, yeah."

He has come to this philosophy through a series of realisations. He says he lost Head to the light for a while, but understands the guitarist turned to God because he was a very dark place. That growing up in Bakersfield, he started becoming more at home in the dark. That he's always felt a tug of war between negative and positive. That it makes sense in his head.

From the outside, it sounds like a simplistic explanation, devised by someone who has suffered great trauma and tried to answer the age-old question of why bad things happen to good people. We gently ask whether it's an attempt to rationalise what's happened.

"Maybe it's my way to rationalise it. I don't know. But that's all I know," he concedes. "Everything in our

consciousness is negative and positive. Down to our *atoms*."

Korn recorded *The Nothing* in Nashville, but Jonathan refused to go there. In his grieving condition, he couldn't "vibe" with returning producer Nick Raskulinecz, felt like everyone was over-analysing the music due to the band's new management, and wanted to be alone. So last November he locked himself in his own place, Buck Owens Studio, once run by his father and named after the late Bakersfield country music star. Engineers Chris Collier and Jim Monti, who are also close friends, helped him capture his vocals.

"I wanted to make a statement, do some shit that hadn't been done in a long time," he explains. "And really this was the first time I've *had* time, where I wasn't completely losing my shit worried about what's going on at home. So I had that luxury too, and I went in and did the best I could possibly do on a record."

The results are startling. First track *The End Begins* opens with nostalgic bagpipes, before Jonathan repeats the phrase: *'What did you mean, what did you mean, now they are free and they are coming after me'*, which overlaps with the sound of him crying out in fear. There are moments when he's engaged in a call and response with himself, such as on the agitated *H@rd3r*. Or when his voice is a menacing, multi-tracked force, as on twisted throwback song *The Ringmaster*. The multiple voices are often claustrophobic, overwhelming. He never did one vocal on the same mic, and had four set up in a row. Guitarist Head has since said

"I'VE BEEN HOUNDED MY WHOLE LIFE BECAUSE OF THE GOOD I'VE DONE"

JONATHAN DAVIS

Jonathan worked the hardest he'd done since 2002's big-budget *Untouchables*.

"I had fun doing it, but it wasn't fun," Jonathan confesses. He isn't wearing his trademark glasses today, and keeps running his hand up over his forehead and then down his dark brown semi-dreads. There is a box of Nurofen beside him on the table. He needlessly apologises for his body language. "I'm all fucked up; sorry I'm doing this sort of shit. From the shows, I did something to my neck and I'm suffering from vertigo, so the room's spinning. I'm like, 'Ugh, I'm trying to talk!'" he laughs good-naturedly.

Oh no, do you need some water?

"No, it's all good," he replies. "It's been going on for a while, so I had my head scanned. Nothing's wrong, it's just gotta be muscular shit in my head. But I've been beating myself up for 25 years onstage. Fuck…"

Since giving up booze in his 20s, Jonathan has developed remarkable resilience and self-reliance. He mostly dealt with these latest trials alone, and didn't see a therapist – "I've seen therapists before, and I'd know what the fuck they're going to say, honestly." It took a toll on his body, as documented on *This Loss* (*'Itty bitty, oh so pretty, as I watch myself break down / satisfying as I'm crying, watch the vomit hit the ground'*).

"Yeah, you puke your guts out, I did it all the time," he states. "It's still hard, I still tear up, I still get fucked up about it. But people enjoy my pain, I guess."

He holds our gaze. We both know that music is his therapy, that he's made a living from it, that we're

PRESS/JIMMY FONTAINE.

sitting here today because of that, and *Hammer*'s asking these questions because it's our job. Still, we feel a little worried we've overstepped the mark, and tell him, truthfully, we're sorry to hear what he's been through.

"It's life. I'm from Bakersfield, home of country artists. There's a lot of fucking bad shit that's happened to me, just like most country artists. But it's about how you deal with it, and persevere. I gotta keep going, I can't fucking stop, I've got two little boys that depend on me."

How do you see yourself primarily? Korn frontman? Dad? Human being?

"I just see myself as… everyone calls me this, I'm more of a father figure. I try to take care of everybody's shit. And yeah, I don't look at myself as me, pretty much. No one takes care of me, I take care of everybody else, all the time. I'm always trying to fix everything."

Do you like that, or not?

"Obviously I do it, so I must. I'm just a caring person."

Twice during our time together, he checks his phone. His son Zeppelin, 12, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes in 2014 and wears a continuous glucose monitor that allows Jonathan to track his blood sugar via an app. The condition has been a huge worry, another source of dark energy, but the device gives him some peace of mind. For this album, Zeppelin ('Zeppy') and his 14-year-old brother, Pirate, kept their normal routine while Jonathan worked at Buck Owens and returned home at night (he also has an older son, Nathan, 23). On previous records, he'd brought the pair to the studio with him so he could look after them.

"I had to take care of the boys for years by myself," he reveals. "Their mom tried, but when she was good, everything was fine, she was great. Mental illness doesn't let up, it's not something that… it's a horrible disease. Because I watched her from when she was fine to just like that, she snaps. All they do is give you medicine that makes you even worse."

"I'M A FATHER FIGURE AND TAKE CARE OF EVERYBODY'S SHIT. NO ONE TAKES CARE OF ME"

JONATHAN DAVIS

Therapy: JD venting through his Giger mic

He still loves America but is frustrated with its for-profit healthcare system. He is hopeful about medical professionals looking into psychedelics as a more natural drug, and is even thinking about trying out microdosing, where you take small amounts of LSD in an attempt to rewire the brain rather than get high.

"It's a lot better than fucking [antipsychotic medication] Seroquel and watching someone slobber all over themselves and shit the floor. That's what the drug does to people. And then that's somehow a cure. So yeah, I saw lots of horrible, horrible shit, dealt with lots of horrible shit, and nobody knew this while I was going through it, doing this for years."

Jonathan has long been shouldering burdens, and Korn has been his way to vent; looking back through previous songs, there are veiled clues about the private life he's been leading. He is rightly proud of *The Nothing*, which is likely to please old-school fans. As well as the bagpipes on intro *The End Begins*, other interludes *The Seduction Of Indulgence* and *Surrender To Failure* are raw expressions, reminiscent of their self-titled debut album closer, *Daddy*.

"I've always said I'm not going to keep doing bagpipes every fucking record because it's expected, or like when I scat," he grins. "I'm like, 'Fuck no', because it won't be special no more. So yeah, I *wanted* to do a bagpipe intro, kind of inspired by listening to the *Issues* record that has one. All the pain and crazy shit I went through is in those interludes. After the record was done, I was like, 'I need something put in there to get more of the story.' It added the frosting on the cake."

This year marks 20 years of *Issues* as well, doesn't it?

"And coming up in October, it's going to be 25 years since the first one came out. I can't believe it – we're eligible for the rock'n'roll hall of fame now! Ha ha! I'm in a classic rock band!"

How does that feel? "Insane."

For all the hardships, there is lots to be hopeful about. Korn have a respected legacy and a bright future. They are excited about their new management company, who Jonathan credits with making them a headline band again. He can't help but be candid about his feelings, because it's all he's ever done, and likens recording *The Nothing* to pouring alcohol in the wound – "It's painful, but it's necessary and the outcome's good." And if this record does some good by helping others too, that's a risk he's willing to take. H

***THE NOTHING* IS OUT SEPTEMBER 13 VIA ROADRUNNER / ELEKTRA**

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BRUTE FORCE

Brutal death metal is on the rise, and Baltimore's Visceral Disgorge are aggressively leading the pack. But can music this heavy make it to the mainstream?

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

PRESS/LEXI DUNCAN

VISCERAL DISGORGE

What could possibly be more brutal than death metal? The answer is pretty obvious: brutal death metal. A particularly aggressive and resolutely uncommercial sub-strain of musical extremity, it's an enduring subgenre that grew from the seminal efforts of New York legends Suffocation in the early 90s and is currently enjoying greater popularity than ever before, thanks in part to its hottest rising band, Visceral Disgorge.

Formed in Baltimore, Maryland, in 2007 by vocalist Travis Werner and guitarist Eric Vieraitis, Visceral Disgorge may not strike the untrained ear as being particularly different from the frankly mind-boggling number of brutal death metal bands in the underground today. But when the band released their debut album, *Ingesting Putridity*, in 2011, it had an immediate and telling impact. Despite conforming to most of brutal death metal's integral tropes – gruesome, wince-inducing lyrics included – songs such as *Necrocoprophagia* (Sample lyric: *'Tonight I feast on rotten flesh and faeces'*) and the charming *Strangled And Sodomized* packed a far weightier punch than most, both in terms of songwriting and production. With one foot in the so-called *slamming* brutal death metal camp (as pioneered by the likes of Internal Bleeding, Dying Fetus and Skinless), Visceral Disgorge simply sounded bigger, groovier and more brutal than anything else around.

"With the first album, I think production had a big role to play," frontman Travis Werner tells *Hammer*. "Back in 2011, *and* a few years before that, all of the slam bands or brutal death metal bands had really lo-fi production, and hundreds started popping up all over the world and you couldn't tell one band from the next. So with our production, it set us apart a little bit. We didn't sound exactly like every other band."

"OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS A LOT OF SLAM KIDS HAVE POPPED UP!"
TRAVIS WERNER

It's a slightly bewildered Travis that speaks to *Metal Hammer* today. He seems genuinely surprised that we want to write about his band, which says a lot about how deeply underground Visceral Disgorge's music has been until now. But as the band prepare to release their long-awaited second album, *Slithering Evisceration*, it's clear that Travis's band and the entire brutal death metal genre are heading onwards and upwards.

This summer, Visceral Disgorge will tour the US with Australian comrades Disentomb as brutal death metal's two biggest names on the annual Bloodletting tour across North America. The rest of the bill is unerringly monstrous too, with highly rated newbies Within Destruction and Signs Of The Swarm included, both of whom blur the lines between brutal death metal, its much-maligned sonic cousin deathcore and the more nebulous phenomenon of 'slam' (see Police Brutality, right). Splitting hairs about the differences between tiny, underground subgenres is a hugely popular pastime among fans of this stuff, but Travis is happy to provide a sliver of clarity on the subject.

"I always put *us* in the brutal death metal category," he shrugs. "Over the past few years, I guess a lot of slam kids popped up! To me it's weird, because I hear that term now more and more, but I think it's getting harder to define. I don't know if someone's talking about 'slam', do they mean brutal death metal or deathcore or some kind of beatdown hardcore stuff? I guess certain bands incorporate more slams into their sound than *we* do, so I guess technically they would be *more* slam… I don't know, man, it's hard for me to say! Ha ha ha!"

Negotiating the treacherous road between underground acclaim and mainstream acceptance was never going to be easy for a band that sound like Visceral Disgorge, but Travis concedes that the huge delay between albums one and two has been stressful and frustrating.

"It's taken so long to put out new music, because we've always been plagued with members that couldn't commit to touring internationally," he sighs. "So that's been the real reason why it's taken so long – just getting the line-up right. It seemed like once somebody would join the band, a year later they'd decide, 'Oh yeah, this ain't for me…'! OK, thanks dude, you know?"

The single biggest problem that Visceral Disgorge faced over the last eight years was the untimely passing of original guitarist and chief songwriter Steve Rosenzweig in 2014. Although Travis is reluctant to delve into the details of that period, he does note that losing his friend and bandmate had an undeniable impact on the band's ability to move forward.

"A lot of the material that we'd written until that point, it wasn't really documented," he shrugs. "Steve didn't write it down, so we just knew a few songs from just messing around with stuff. Once he died, no one remembered the stuff, so it kind of got lost with him. Maybe a year after he passed, early in 2015, that's when Charlie [Marvel, current VD guitarist] and Eric Little [bassist] joined the line-up. From 2015, we probably spent a year getting those two up to speed and that's when we went to Europe."

When Visceral Disgorge hit the road with Disentomb across North America this summer, it will be a reunion that they're all relishing. When they first met in 2016, it was for Visceral Disgorge's first experience of touring in Europe. Brutal death metal has a strong following all over the continent, of course, but no one was predicting that the tour would be quite the success it turned out to be.

"Yeah, that was our first time in Europe and it was amazing!" grins Travis, chuckling at the memory. "We didn't expect such a good response at all. We didn't expect the *attendance*. Even our tour manager commented, because he'd worked with some bigger bands in the past. He said, 'I never heard of your band and I didn't expect anybody at the shows, but this is amazing! There are people here!' Ha ha ha! So it felt so good to go out and crush it every night. Nine out of 10 shows were bangers. It was great to get over there and get our feet wet."

Disentomb guitarist Jake Wilkes also regards that tour as a pivotal moment.

"I definitely look back on that tour with fond memories," he says. "Having 20 or so strangers suddenly living on top of each other in a bus is always a barrel of laughs. The VD guys were all on the level, so it ruled."

Visceral Disgorge: determined to drag brutal death metal out of the underground

Jake also notes that the forthcoming Bloodletting tour does seem to be a watershed moment for a style of music that few ever expected to have genuine commercial appeal.

"It's pretty amazing to see so many people finding value in a genre that used to be fairly obscure, even to most metalheads. All six bands on the Bloodletting tour are towards the more extreme side of death metal, and the reaction has been overwhelmingly positive, so I think it's definitely a sign that brutal death metal is becoming more popular."

The new Visceral Disgorge album may be unlikely to turn the band into rock stars, but it does sound like the kind of snarling, explosive monster that could easily win over a shitload of new converts. Travis admits that his main worry over the last few years was that his band would fail to live up to expectations. For anyone with even a passing interest in death metal, *Slithering Evisceration* is one of 2019's biggest deals.

"I had a lot of stress and anxiety throughout the whole process of writing and recording, just because I didn't want to fuck up," the vocalist grimaces. "I wanted to give our fans the best thing that we could."

As it turns out, the album is an absolute beast and Visceral Disgorge are finally poised to capitalise on the notoriety they earned with their debut. With lyrics that veer into cosmic horror territory, rather than flat-out gore, and songs that are as memorable as they are terrifying, *Slithering Evisceration* sounds like the work of genuine heavyweights. Brutal death metal may still belong firmly in the underground shadows, but Travis is happy to admit that his ambitions extend beyond playing to the already converted.

"It's very un-brutal death metal to say, but I think it is important to try and reach the biggest amount of kids, the biggest audience we can. When I first got into music, I imagined myself on a big stage. I didn't imagine myself in some fucking dive bar, playing to 15 people, you know? We just strive for longevity. And for an underground brutal death metal band, I think we're doing pretty fucking good!"

SLITHERING EVISCERATION IS OUT ON SEPTEMBER 13 VIA AGONIA

PRESS/LEXI DUNCAN

POLICE BRUTALITY

How Slovenian slamming deathcore crew Within Destruction invented the Slam Police to deal with the trolls...

WHO ARE THE SLAM POLICE?
"Slam police are basically genre police. It just started with the whole slam/deathcore war! When we released our album *Void* through Slam Worldwide's YouTube channel, it got quite a lot of hype and everyone was arguing about our sound all over social media. Obviously I found that very amusing so I was thinking how to turn all this shit-talk to our advantage. And so Slam Police was born!"

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?
"I started making memes about them, trying to make them angrier. I even started making posts about us being 'super old-school slam' so I could wind people up and see if they would start arguing... and it worked every time!"

COULD YOU ACTUALLY DEFINE 'SLAM'?
"It's hard to draw a line somewhere and say 'this is slam' or 'this is deathcore', because everyone has their own interpretation of what defines those genres. The problem nowadays is that everyone thinks they are right on the internet so people argue all the time that their interpretation is correct. It's stupid, but for bands it is definitely great because people are talking about them!"

AND ARE YOU GUILTY OF FAKE SLAM?
"Definitely! I only started seeing this term after Slam Police were born. Slam Police saw that there was no way of convincing anyone that we're deathcore so they just started calling us fake slam instead. But really, we are True Slam!"

FOR MORE ON WITHIN DESTRUCTION SEE: WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/WITHINDESTRUCTIONTRUESLAM

HOMEWARD SOUND

Cult Of Luna spent years writing concept albums. When they felt a burning desire to look closer to home, it produced something truly special

WORDS: TOM O'BOYLE

As a teenager, Cult Of Luna's Johannes Persson couldn't wait to leave Umeå. His small hometown in the north of Sweden is the kind of place where nothing much happens, though that boredom did spawn the thriving hardcore scene that Cult Of Luna grew up in and that Johannes still feels inexorably drawn back to.

"I still have my feet in the hardcore scene," he says in his Swedish-inflected accent, ever enthusiastic, with the occasional long pause as he searches for the right word in English. "It's where I belong. I love metal but I cannot deny where I came from. Stagediving happens every now and then, but mostly I'm the guy with his arms folded at the back of the room – I'm doing my job as a 40-year-old!" he laughs.

Johannes left Umeå years ago for the modern bustle of the capital, Stockholm, but since turning 40 he's found his thoughts increasingly drawn back there, leading him to consider his future. Today we're talking to him during a vacation there with his partner and two young children.

"Many who leave Umeå are glad of it," he explains. "I was for a while, but then I realised slowly but surely that every tattoo I got had a theme drawn from the Umeå area; the countryside, the nature – this can't come from nothing."

It's a yearning he increasingly realised during the instinctual writing process of new album *A Dawn To Fear*, a departure from their past high-concept records that have documented man's journey "from the rural, to the city, to the sky, to space," and culminated with *Mariner*, their 2016 collaborative sci-fi epic with New York-based avant-garde singer Julie Christmas.

Back then, Johannes feared *Mariner* would "ruin everything" due to the clash of musical worlds, but it proved a career high point, a project meant to stay in the studio

that resulted in several acclaimed live performances. Moving on, the band didn't want to repeat themselves and Johannes, as chief songwriter, found himself taking the time to simply pick up a guitar and write with no "Cult Of Luna formula" in mind.

"I wanted to distance this record from the journey we've taken, because I've noticed small changes in what I value and how I think; a spontaneous and natural part of ageing," he muses. "What would happen if I release that in my writing – unleash that beast of who I am without knowing it?"

The result isn't too different from Cult Of Luna's classic sound, but what is different is a sense of maturity; of cohesion in the record's twists and turns through mountainous, crushing riffs and atmospheric quietude. It's the product of a special recording session that saw the band reconnect after years of writing and recording their parts for records separately, having all moved away from each other.

For two weeks, they worked at Ocean Sound Recordings, on the tiny island of Giske off the west coast of Norway, with wall-to-ceiling windows overlooking the sea. The band, completed by studio engineer Magnus Líndberg, bassist Andreas Johansson, guitarist Fredrik Kihlberg, drummer Thomas Hedlund and keyboardist Kristian Karlsson, found themselves reinvigorated.

"I would relive those two weeks if I had the chance," Johannes says fondly. "It was the best recording experience I've ever had. Waking up on that small island, the Norwegian mountains in the background, going out for a jog before sitting down and eating breakfast with my best friends and then just going at it. It was a great opportunity to reconnect; it's how I want us to do everything in future."

The deep, earthen connection the record engenders was born not only of such a united experience, but of dark times, and a collective yearning for the nurturing environs of home that saw the band replace synthesisers with the warm, natural tones of organs and other acoustic instruments. "In an early stage I understood my writing pointed to home, and we thought, 'OK, home – a rural, organic place where every school used to have an organ.' We wanted the record to smell of wood."

The conversation turns to the way your environment can affect your listening experience, and how it led to an unforgettable moment for the band when they put on *We Feel The End*, a song written by guitarist Fredrik.

"He has gone though some dark periods in the last couple of years – I'm not gonna get into it – but we understood where the song was coming from," says Johannes. "One night we finally sat down and listened to it. We opened the big windows to get some air in and could hear the sea as the first notes of the song began. It was just..."

"I THOUGHT, WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I UNLEASHED THAT BEAST?"

JOHANNES PERSSON

He trails off in a gasp. "Magic is the wrong word for many reasons, but I'd say it was very emotional. As the last tones faded out and the sound of the sea returned to the background, nobody said anything. It was very, very special."

The record is full of imagery about light and darkness, and allusions to death abound. Its title, *A Dawn To Fear*, is borne of Johannes' misanthropic worldview. "I'm not that positive about the future," he says, speaking at once of global concerns and deeply personal experiences. "I know exactly what I was thinking when I wrote the title track; read the lyrics and you'll get an idea. It was one of the saddest, most emotional things I've seen in my life, a sight I'll never forget. The title has to do with wanting to stop time, when you really don't want tomorrow to come, you don't want to have to face whatever you have to face."

He agrees that this applies too to the current environmental crisis. "I have two kids, I need to see the bigger picture – how is Stockholm going to be in the future? I'm not even talking about social

Cult Of Luna (left to right): Andreas Johansson, Kristian Karlsson, Fredrik Kihlberg, Thomas Hedlund, Johannes Persson, Magnus Lindberg

PRESS/SILVIA GRAV

unrest – I'm talking about how climate change is going to affect us, so I'm not sure I want to stay there. I'm scared of what's gonna happen in 20, 30 years – let's say this heatwave in southern Europe, if that's the new norm and things are going to get worse, then that is a dawn to fear in the literal sense."

Back to thoughts of the present, and Johannes is excited that the band have shows planned until next summer, a rare feeling for a band traditionally reluctant to tour and notoriously stubborn to work with. "When you're in your early 20s and just happy to be on a label, you say yes to more things. Now, if I'm not into an idea, I say no. I won't even discuss it – we have nothing to lose anymore," he explains. "Half of what we have achieved together would be enough. From the start we haven't been easy to work with, that's for sure – because we have creative integrity."

It's an attitude born of their hardcore origins that they share with a band they're often compared to – Neurosis, another former hardcore band that transcended their roots. "They're still punk," enthuses Johannes. "The music is not, but you can see the honesty in what they're doing. I don't care what you do, as long as it comes from the heart – unfiltered, pure emotion. Our records and theirs are not that similar, but I hope we are motivated by the same will to constantly evolve."

The will to evolve is central to Cult Of Luna, but for now Johannes will use *A Dawn To Fear* and their forthcoming tours to take comfort in thoughts of their origins. "I will always be drawn back to hardcore for the same reason this place up north draws me back," he finishes. "It's where I grew up, where my heart is. It's where I feel at home."

A DAWN TO FEAR IS OUT ON SEPTEMBER 20 VIA METAL BLADE. CULT OF LUNA PLAY THE UK IN NOVEMBER – SEE P.109

CUT OF LUNA

Johannes also works in casting in Swedish TV, and explains how he's branching out to directing and writing

As we speak to Johannes, he's putting the finishing touches to a 20-minute video for *A Dawn To Fear*'s first two tracks – *The Silent Man* and *Lay Your Head To Rest*. He wrote and directed it, and it's more like a short film than a music video.

"It's been a nightmare, but I love how it turned out," he enthuses. "I think it turned out well without destroying the tracks; I'm happy I spent countless nights staring out into nothing trying to find ways of telling a 20-minute story without dialogue!"

The film will be released in two parts, the first of which came out at the end of July, the band's cataclysmic exhortations paired with sparse visuals of an ageing man seemingly trapped between past and present, loved ones reduced to ash, the sunlight at the break of dawn ominous in his grief-stricken eyes.

Johannes has now got the directing bug, and hopes to make music videos for other bands, but in the meantime he's working on a horror/thriller screenplay based on a nightmare he had.

"It kind of wrote itself," he says. "I wrote a 25-page treatment, then I wrote it as a screenplay. It ended up being 125 pages – way too long and full of plot holes, but now I'm going back and filling those things. I'm rewriting the stuff that didn't work; characters that felt flat at the beginning I know much better now."

He's enjoyed the process, but fears people might judge him on the end result… "If it ever gets to the screen, the only thing I'll worry about is what people are going to think of what goes on in my mind!"

THE 25 GREATEST POWER METAL ALBUMS

In a world where Sabaton are headlining arenas and Powerwolf are playing main stages across Europe, power metal is bigger than ever. We count down the subgenre's most epic albums ever

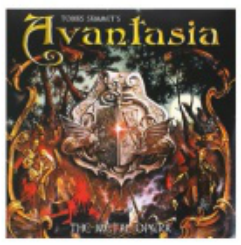
WORDS: CHRIS CHANTLER

Initially, 'power metal' was just one of several interchangeable labels hanging around the early 80s underground to describe the intensification of metal beyond its 70s roots, towards a rougher, tougher, distilled strain of metal that reached for epic and fantastical themes. We can trace a line of inspiration back to the bespoke mythology of early Queen, Led Zeppelin's *Achilles Last Stand*, Uriah Heep's *Demons & Wizards*, Scorpions' *Taken By Force*, Judas Priest circa *Stained Class* and Dio-era Sabbath, but it's surely 1976's *Rainbow Rising* that most prominently sired the medieval fixation, virtuoso musicianship and classical influences that became so key to the sound.

Key to its look was the Sword and Sorcery theme, enjoying a glorious pop-cultural boom with films like *Dragonslayer, Excalibur and Conan The Barbarian*, role-playing games like Dungeons & Dragons, *Fighting Fantasy* books and *He-Man*. Manowar were the most visibly heroic of a mighty USPM wave circa 1982-85, and a German scene was emerging in parallel, with Helloween, Grave Digger, Rage and Running Wild ratcheting up their New Wave Of British Heavy Metal influence. Meanwhile, Swedish neo-classical sensation Yngwie Malmsteen was setting new templates for young six-string obsessives.

For half of the 90s, the genre was shamed into hiding, while grunge, groove, alternative and death/black metal trends reigned. These were hard times for any who yearned for high-pitched vocal melodies about eagles and wizards. But with pride, skill, persistence and conviction, champions like Blind Guardian, Gamma Ray, Iced Earth and Stratovarius wrestled the genre back into the limelight. Their hard work paid off; when HammerFall, Rhapsody and Nightwish released debuts in 1997, the scene exploded.

Power metal remains a Marmite presence in our lives - Powerwolf, Sabaton and Gloryhammer inspire devotion and derision in equal measure - but its contribution to metal is inestimable. We celebrate 25 of the noblest artefacts in this or any other realm (though, in the name of bringing balance to said realm, only one album per band was allowed).



25. AVANTASIA

The Metal Opera (2001)

With Avantasia, multi-instrumentalist, vocalist and creative mastermind Tobias Sammet took the best speedy melodic metal from his main band Edguy and allied it to a more atmospheric, intricate musical soundscape ("maybe a little more bombastic," Tobias admits in the liner notes) on this fantastical concept album. It's less facetious than Edguy – despite the preponderance of elves, dwarves and evil popes (given voice by a stellar cast of guests from Stratovarius, Gamma Ray, Helloween, Virgin Steele, Angra and Within Temptation) – but Tobias retained the knack for a gleaming singalong chorus, and kept the brooding interludes to a strict minimum.

24. CLOVEN HOOF

A Sultan's Ransom (1989)

"Cloven Hoof brew a foaming flagon of astro-physical metal that flies on wings of steel," wrote the brilliant Chris Welch in *Metal Hammer* in October '89, reviewing the third LP by these ambitious British underdogs. He got it, but although Cloven Hoof's metal was smack-bang in the sweet spot between 80s USPM and European sounds, the luckless Wolverhampton foursome ended up marginalised by the prevailing trends of thrash, glam and grunge. *A Sultan's Ransom* was to be their last LP for 17 years, yet the record still sounds vigorous and full of life, like it's booting British metal into the 90s.

23. DOOMSWORD

Let Battle Commence (2003)

Embracing a more melancholic, war-weary, mud-caked strain of barbarian power-doom, these solemn Italian heavyweights repudiated the imperial glory of their Roman forebears in favour of marauding Norsemen. This concept album about the Viking siege of York in 866 is augmented with sounds of clashing swords, hooves and sea-spray. DoomSword conjure the epic from the earthy like no other band, making dead-simple chords chugged over lyrics like *'Burn England to the ground!'* sound ineffably mighty and commanding. The inverse of Rhapsody's florid, upbeat 'Hollywood metal' bombast, DoomSword are a sorrowful trudge through rain-lashed battlefields, surrounded by the corpses of brave friends.

22. KAMELOT

Epica (2003)

A symphonic, melodic power-prog band from Florida, with a Norwegian-Thai singer, tackling the German legend of Faust with such unorthodox instruments as the West African djembe and the South American bandoneon… Kamelot were never more anomalous than on this definitive work, opening with their best song, the glittering thrill-ride *Center Of The Universe*. Roy Khan's stunning voice expertly strides the line between rousing metallic conviction and emotive, Andrew Lloyd Webberish theatricality, while guitarist Thomas Youngblood overflows with so many great ideas, the concept rolled over onto the next album. Dutch symphonic metallers Epica were moved to take the name shortly after its release.

21. ELIXIR

The Son Of Odin (1986)

Unimaginatively written off by the UK press as Maiden copyists, cult London quintet Elixir arrived too late to catch the NWOBHM's heyday, but their metal was too epic to be confined by that scene. Honing a very British strain of rugged power metal on this rollicking debut, *Elixir* also incorporated prog and thrash influences into their spunky twin-guitar anthems. With lyrics about Greek and Norse mythology, Satanic ritual, space travel, medieval skulduggery and hunting buried treasure, *The Son Of Odin* is a righteous compendium of ripping yarns, and Dio himself was a big fan of the LP's addictive single, *Treachery*.

Carolus Rex is Sabaton's crowning glory

20. SABATON

Carolus Rex (2012)

Quadruple platinum in their homeland – released in both English and Swedish language editions – Sabaton here rose to the challenge of soundtracking the rise and fall of the Swedish Empire, with particular emphasis on their military leader, King Charles XII. This focus, and their closeness to the history, clinched the boys their most triumphant platter, both creatively and commercially, the regal subject matter reflected in elegant, stately arrangements, grandiose choirs and Joakim Brodén's proud, declamatory diction. Behind the epic sweep, the importance of directness and simplicity to Sabaton's MO wasn't forgotten in resounding neck-snappers *The Lion From The North* and *Killing Ground*.

PRESS

19. SYMPHONY X

The Odyssey (2002)

With *The Odyssey*, New Jersey's neo-classical sensation Symphony X achieved two things. One was to plant their flag firmly in the very heavy metal camp, getting dense and raucous with Dimebag-damaged staccato riffage and tech-thrash chops. Russell Allen added growls to his powerful vocal range and solos reined in the widdly excess, sharpening the songwriting and cementing their credentials among rivetheads. The other was to deliriously nail the whole ethos of epic, symphonic neo-classical power-prog in 25 minutes, with the momentous, Technicolor title track – an enthralling experience retelling Homer's *Odyssey* via guitar, bass, drums, synths and voice.

18. NIGHTWISH

Wishmaster (2000)

This is where everything really came together for the sainted Finns, the first band to fully grasp the genre's expressive operatic capabilities. Almost every tune was a beautifully crafted nugget of infectious Lloyd Webber Metal ear-candy, all incisive hooks and magical theatrical choruses. Majestic closing epic *FantasMic*, named after a Disneyland fireworks display, expresses Tuomas Holopainen's profound Disney-love, which is exactly the sort of thing only Nightwish have the balls to do. Symphonic PM was never the same again; walking around Wacken 2019, it was striking how many songs owe debts to *Wishmaster*'s stirring title track.

17. RUNNING WILD

Death Or Glory (1989)

The fifth LP in a career that stretches back to the mid-70s, *Death Or Glory* nailed this much-loved Hamburg quartet's pirate metal madness. It boasted a glorious swagger, a heavy-as-hell sound and a set of euphoric killer tunes, each one an involving tales of ye olde historical derring-do (except anti-Nazi single *Bad To The Bone*), given life by Rock'n'Rolf's committed snarl and huge, ripping guitar. Running Wild reached a piratical pinnacle of energy and attitude, finding the optimum tone and pace for their swashbuckling power metal on an album that's both wildly OTT and, somehow, oddly classy.

16. OMEN

Battle Cry (1984)

Circa 1984, American metalheads were hooked on medieval England. LA's Omen joined the fray with this spirited Metal Blade debut neatly encapsulated by the amateurish charm of its hand-drawn artwork. Roughening and toughening the NWOBHM blueprint with heaps more swords, sorcery, dungeons, dragons, studs and chains, Omen were key players honing the potent blend of epic and earthy that came to define the best USPM of the era, with the ripping guitars of Kenny Powell and the commanding voice of much-missed frontman JD Kimball pushing manly anthems like *The Axeman* and *Dragon's Breath* towards the legendary end of cult status.

15. ANGRA

Rebirth (2001)

Angra's fourth LP was a triumphant literal rebirth for the Brazilian scene leaders. Flamboyant guitar duo Kiko Loureiro and Rafael Bittencourt had to replace their singer, drummer and bassist before the recording, yet the fluidity, cohesiveness and dynamism of this stakes-raising album suggest a band bonded with indecent speed. Alternating some of Angra's fastest, heaviest headbangers (*Nova Era, Acid Rain, Running Alone*) with more sedate, reflective melodic yearnings (culminating in Kiko's closing rearrangement of a Chopin opus), *Rebirth* also incorporates moments of balladic delicacy, symphonic bombast, dense progressive textures and Latin grooves and rhythms, the whole distinguished by a permeating atmosphere of joy.

14. CIRITH UNGOL

King Of The Dead (1984)

These Tolkien-indebted Californians formed as early as 1971, embracing the 80s metal revolution on versatile 1981 debut *Frost & Fire*. However, when this material was rejected by their local rock station for being 'too heavy', the band resolved to crank up the power: "We decided that if our commercial songs were too heavy, then on our next album we'd really pull out all the stops and play what we really wanted to, the heaviest metal known to man!" recalls drummer Rob Garven. "The result was *King Of The Dead*, a Churning Maelstrom of Metal Chaos Descending!" Well put, sir.

Queensrÿche deliver a friendly warning

13. QUEENSRŸCHE

The Warning (1984)

Before conquering the mainstream with *Operation: Mindcrime*, Seattle's prog-metal pioneers had a precociously firm grasp on their own brand of high-tech, visionary power metal, evident in the bravura dramatics of Geoff Tate's voice and the dark, pensive arrangements. The orchestral prog touches are discreet on Queensrÿche's full-length debut, but the high harmony choruses, stately riffs and galloping Maiden-esque twin guitars mark it out as a very metal beast. The band soon fled their USPM roots for platinum-selling stadium rock glory, but *The Warning*'s influence on the more progressive, cerebral, melodic strains of the genre remains of crucial importance.

12. VIRGIN STEELE

The House Of Atreus Act II (2000)

Subtitled 'A Barbaric-Romantic Opera' – and actually staged as musical theatre (in Germany) – the New Yorkers' 10th album is the conclusion of their retelling of Aeschylus's Greek tragedies, a monument to total conviction and obsessive zeal. Flamboyant frontman David DeFeis brings a lightness to his voice, but the tenderness of the melodies is counterpointed by his vengeful growls and rugged shrieks, as well as scything riffs, propulsive tempos and an epic narrative thrust.

11. ICED EARTH

Something Wicked This Way Comes (1998)

Iced Earth's first four albums were more complex, but Jon Schaffer's tech-thrash chops and Matt Barlow's dramatic pipes reach their pinnacle on this more direct offering. The Floridians laid down a versatile set of moods, tugging the heartstrings with *Watching Over Me* and *Melancholy (Holy Martyr)* while pulling the neck muscles with lean, visceral ragers *Disciples Of The Lie* and *Stand Alone*. But the full epic power source is resoundingly tapped by the compulsive closing *Something Wicked Trilogy* (*Prophecy/Birth Of The Wicked/The Coming Curse*), arguably still the greatest piece of music Iced Earth ever recorded.

GETTY

DragonForce: nailed it

10. DRAGONFORCE

Valley Of The Damned (2003)

The UK took its time to provide a world-class power metal scene leader. After Judas Priest's *Painkiller* gave trad metal a kick up the arse in 1990, other Brits seemed to concede defeat. UKPM sat out the 90s altogether, only regaining momentum in early 2000, when the internet was in the process of revolutionising and democratising the music business. The website mp3.com reported half a million downloads of a demo called *Valley Of The Damned*, an uproarious call-to-arms by London-based sextet Dragonheart. A CD-R followed, this heart-fluttering five-tracker landing like a spandex thunderbolt, energising British metal-heads who'd yearned for a homegrown contender to the power metal elite.

We wanted a British band not just to rival European scene royalty, but take the genre and push it further, shake it up, hoist it to its giddiest zenith, then spray a six-pack of lager all over it and punch it in the face. So thank the Lord for Dragonforce – shrewdly renamed after the discovery of a Brazilian power metal band called Dragonheart, but the emphasis on 'force' was well-placed.

All of the songs were written by early 2001, but it took another two years before the *Valley Of The Damned* LP came out, the savvy self-managed band holding out for the best record contract. "I was handling the deal," guitarist Herman Li told ultimate-guitar.com in 2009, "and thought, 'Why would you sign your life away straight away?' You have to be careful, because if you just rush in, the terms of the record deal could make a big difference."

By the time the debut emerged in February 2003 on Rod Smallwood's Sanctuary Records imprint, some UK power metal thunder had been stolen: Dragonheart off-shoot band Power Quest and Guildford prog-power whizz-kids Shadowkeep were already deep into recording careers. However, after the shit-hot demo and a spreading word-of-mouth reputation for their high-energy live show, Dragonforce's debut was all the more powerful for the wait. As soon as it dropped, the band took their place among the cream of the genre, representing its wildest excesses, where they proudly remain – more visibly than ever since *Guitar Hero* shot their profile into the stratosphere.

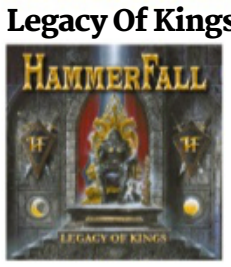
Given the English stereotype of emotional restraint, perhaps it seemed odd for an English band (albeit one with a South African singer, Hong Kong-born guitarist, Ukrainian keyboardist and French drummer) to provide power metal with a ton of its most nakedly emotional melodies, all whizzing by in an electrifying rush, but it's still a keenly anticipated centrepiece of their live set.

With its building succession of jubilant vocal melodies, its malfunctioning-Nintendo tempo taking the BPM beyond previous genre boundaries, and the hungry attack of Herman Li (twice-Golden God winner for Best Shredder, 2005/09) and Sam Totman's twin-axe magic, *Valley Of The Damned* damn-near nails everything straight off the bat, yet energy and excitement levels somehow maintain high for 52 minutes. Even the ballad, *Starfire*, is a first-attempt gold medal winner in affectingly emotional songcraft, yet the lyrics remain metal as fuck, firmly rooted in heroic martial fantasy. Dragonforce's production and performance have since grown more sophisticated, but for its hammering impact and the audacious, open-hearted joy of the songs, *Valley...* triumphs.

Hammerfall: dragons beware!

9. HAMMERFALL

Legacy Of Kings (1998)



HammerFall's 1997 debut, *Glory To The Brave*, signalled a new golden age of power metal, the medieval Swedes breaking through at just the right time in an austere and abrasive decade for metal. Dragonslaying was firmly back on the agenda, and we could wear our old Helloween, Accept and Manowar patches with pride again at last. The impact was profound, but with their second LP HammerFall proved they had the songwriting chops to rival their own influences, in an era when Iron Maiden and Judas Priest were in the creative doldrums. Uncomplicated and direct, but with a majestic bearing, HammerFall hit the nail on the metal head.

8. SAVATAGE

Hall Of The Mountain King (1987)

After their stunning 1983 debut, *Sirens*, these wayward Floridian pioneers dropped the ball on two disappointing records. Apparently heading for commercial oblivion, the quartet recalibrated and marshalled their strengths, tightening, maturing and progressing the dark, atmospheric, twisty-turny power metal of the debut – a sound they'd never revisit after lucratively venturing down the rock opera rabbit hole with 1989's *Gutter Ballet*. They could scarcely improve on the slashing grandiosity of *Hall Of The Mountain King*; certainly not after the tragic death of ace guitarist Criss Oliva in 1993, whose wild, fluid neoclassical solos deck the Hall with regal finery.

PRESS

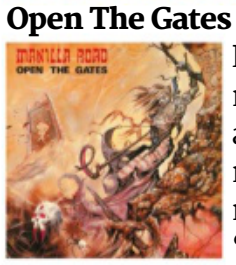
7. STRATOVARIUS

Destiny (1998)

Their seventh album, *Destiny*, was the culmination of this Finnish quintet's first decade of wizardly development, bringing their sharpest skills to bear on a set of sweet pop-metal nuggets, killer trad Euro-bangers, impassioned power ballads and dizzying progressive epics. And what skills! Jens Johansson had honed his triumphant orchestral synth manouevres with Yngwie Malmsteen and Dio; Jorg Michael thumped tubs for Grave Digger and Running Wild; and the two Timos, guitarist Tolkki and singer Kotipelto, here reach their height of form in composition and performance.

6. MANILLA ROAD

Open The Gates (1985)



Led by the valorous nasal storytelling and fiery guitar of much-missed cult metal icon Mark 'The Shark' Shelton, Manilla Road were at the gleaming edge of metal's journey to power in the 80s, releasing at least three albums with a claim on this list. Their fourth LP, *Open The Gates*, is right in the purple patch, laying down a full house of forceful, lurid metal anthems and mystical doomy epics laden with weird bardic atmospheres. Aptly named drummer Randy 'Thrasher' Fox makes his debut, ramping up the pace and attack, and the power trio finally got artwork befitting their creative quality.

5. GAMMA RAY

Land Of The Free (1995)

Having lost estimable vocalist Ralf Scheepers (who applied to audition as Halford's replacement in Priest before forming the excellent Primal Fear), pioneering firebrand guitarist Kai Hansen returned to the microphone – but with far stronger results than his scrappy early Helloween vocals. He refocused Gamma Ray's sound towards the high-energy blend of Teutonic melody and gritty intensity that has defined them since. The mid-90s were a tough time for 'proper metal', but with *Land Of The Free* alongside Blind Guardian's 1995 album *Imaginations From The Other Side*, Germany was working hard to restore pride and kick new life into this beleaguered form. Job done.

4. MANOWAR

Hail To England (1984)

It was murder choosing one Manowar LP to rule them all. At least five of the New York City true metal legion's records are in contention, but after much agony and ecstasy, at the 11th hour it had to come down to *Hail To England*, because tracklist. Thunderous opener *Blood Of My Enemies*, setting an intense new template for Viking metal; *Each Dawn I Die*, a brooding occult death march with Eric Adams proudly proclaiming *'I wear the cat-skin gloves'*; the slashing breakneck fury of *Kill With Power* (lovingly covered by Arch Enemy in 2003); stirring, anthemic love song to the fans *Army Of The Immortals*, Manowar doing more than any band to exalt and unite the global brotherhood of metal at this time; and epic closing doom hymn *Bridge Of Death*, where a possessed Eric spits out some of the era's most outrageously Satanic lyrics (*'Impale me on the horns of death, cut off my head release all my evil / Lucifer is King, praise Satan!'*) before collapsing in evil laughter.

Each song is a textbook exemplar of USPM at its hardest, purest and manliest, Eric Adams' colossal voice brimming with conviction and resolve, Joey DeMaio's roving basslines flapping like power cables in a storm, new boy Scott Columbus laying down his hammer-of-the-gods kit demolition. "I heard [*Hail To England*] at a friend's place and we were both shocked because it was so aggressive!" JB from Grand Magus told *Metal Hammer* in 2016. "I'd obviously heard Venom around then too, but they were never as ferocious as that Manowar album. Also, the sound was not booming; it was very sharp, and I hadn't heard anything like that before, so we were both fascinated and a bit scared when we heard them! It made a huge impression. It sounded really extreme to me."

Then there's the majestic title track, a touching homage to the country where Manowar formed (in Newcastle City Hall, 1980, when Joey DeMaio was Black Sabbath's bass tech and Ross The Boss was the support band's guitarist). Strange as it may seem for a band who went on to be so huge in Germany, Sweden and Greece, we English were the first responders to Manowar's global call to arms.

"The reason we called the album *Hail To England* is because we're with the people who are with us," explained Joey DeMaio in 1984. "When [1982 debut] *Battle Hymns* was released, we suddenly found ourselves dropped by the idiots at the label in America who had no idea how to market us. We were left for dead, and probably would have folded had it not been for the support we got from England. The press over there kept us going. We owe our existence to English heavy metal fans and this is our way of saying 'thank you' to them all… England is like our spiritual home. And this is the one country in the world that's taken us to their hearts."

Of the album itself, Joey declared: "We believe in certain values and won't compromise on them to any extent. Manowar are trying to create six- to 10-minute symphonies that are technically stretching and give the fans something to hold onto beyond simple riffs." Guitarist Ross The Boss was more succinct with his assessment, and even more unequivocal, telling ultimate-guitar.com in 2009: "I thought that the version of the band that played on *Hail To England* was one of the best metal units of all time. Period."

Manowar: did amazing things for power metal, less so for fashion

GETTY

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The Orchard

Blind Guardian on their way to slay some Orcs in, um, an alley

3. BLIND GUARDIAN

Imaginations From The Other Side (1995)

1998's *Nightfall In Middle Earth* was an equally immersive masterwork, but it's easy to rule when you're cribbing Tolkien. *Imaginations From The Other Side* created its own abstruse, metaphysical concept about a boy glimpsing other dimensions, cementing these German veterans (who formed in 1984 as Lucifer's Heritage) as more restlessly creative and cerebral than the average headbanging fare. Make no mistake, the likes of *Script For My Requiem* or *Born In A Mourning Hall* are as vicious and breakneck as any power metal, but there are ingenious melodic ideas pinging everywhere, like sparks from a Catherine Wheel.

2. RHAPSODY

Dawn Of Victory (2000)

These venerable Italian stallions addressed a criticism of their mighty OTT 'Hollywood metal' sound on their dazzling third album by cranking up the guitars and restraining the symphonic synths (slightly) to assert the rampaging attack of energetic epics such as *Holy Thunderforce, Triumph For My Magic Steel* and *Dargor, Shadowlord Of The Black Mountain*. The white-knuckle turning point of the Emerald Sword Saga – Rhapsody's madly Tolkienesque narrative concept underpinning their first five albums – this is where the story takes on a sense of dynamic momentum and fully fledged worldbuilding, while the band's bubbling interplay and sheer virtuosic force still floors jaws.

Rhapsody: one in the eye for their critics

PRESS

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1. HELLOWEEN

Keeper Of The Seven Keys Part II (1988)

Very few tunes anticipate the sound of an entire subgenre as powerfully as *Eagle Fly Free*, the first song on Helloween's game-changing third album. Ten years after its release, musicians the world over were frantically trying to replicate its magic ingredients. There were the heroic, nut-squeezing pipes of self-trained vocal dynamo Michael Kiske; Kai Hansen and Michael Weikath's intricate, high-energy twin-guitar leads; lush symphonic backing; Ingo Schwichtenberg's explosive percussive momentum; and lyrics about birds of prey in flight. It started here. And it progressed in jaw-dropping ways across the length of the perfectly sequenced album, with artful, reflective arrangements like *You Always Walk Alone* and *March Of Time* contrasting with the pointed craziness of *Rise And Fall* and *Dr. Stein*. Sometime bonus track *Save Us* neatly ramps up the album's quotient of fist-pumping power bangers, the singalong chorus given gravitas by a portentous, philosophical spoken-word section.

Helloween slightly over-compensated for the old stereotype of 'humourless Germans' with their pumpkin-headed comic-book tomfoolery and zany lyrics (see *Rise And Fall*'s *'The king of Los Angeles bought himself a teddy bear / And the queen became shameless, she did it with a chair'...*) but there is pleasing mischief about the way that the *Keeper* albums have only the appearance of a grand fantasy narrative. Despite appearing on many 'best concept album' lists, there's no tale to speak of; the weight of the whole concept is carried by the throbbing, 13-minute title track, a windswept masterpiece bearing the full epic mother lode.

"No, we didn't plan any concept album," confirms Michael. "We just followed the sound and the signs we had. We only had the overall sound on our mind and we liked the tradition in having super-long tracks on the album to be played for the hippie heavy rock fans!"

Every subsequent power metal album owes *Keeper II* a debt; its songs have been covered by HammerFall, Sonata Arctica, Luca Turilli's Rhapsody, Freedom Call, Twilight Force, Vision Divine and many more. "They created the whole genre of music that's now known as power metal." Not my words, Carol, those are the words of big wrestler and Fozzy frontman Chris Jericho, singling out *Keeper II* as his "perfect album" in *Metal Hammer* earlier this year. "Metallica had the speed and Iron Maiden had the harmony guitars, but Helloween put it together – you had the massive double bass beat with these crazy, intricate harmonies... Michael is one of the greatest singers in history, and this is the greatest power metal album ever made."

Avenged Sevenfold frontman M Shadows also places *Keeper II* in his top 10, telling *Rolling Stone* he first heard Kai Hansen's classic motivational screamer *I Want Out* in a San Jose tattoo parlour: "I heard that song and I thought, 'There was no way there could be any songs as crisp and clean and cool as this'... This record really got me into what was possible on the melodic side of metal. You didn't always have to be brash or vulnerable like Korn or insane like System. This is like straight-ahead, almost feels like punk rock in terms of some of the tempos. But it's just super-smooth and it's just amazing songwriting to me."

The symphonic backing was key to the LP's distinctive and grand sound, something Kai flagged up in *Metal Hammer* in August 1988: "We still play fast, but it's more in a classical direction. Many overdubs in an orchestral way," explained the guitarist. "We've used an emulator played by Tommy Hansen to simulate an orchestra at places. We've got a keyboard player coming on tour with us, to use whenever we think it might be useful. But we can play these songs with two guitars and they'd still sound good. There's a lot of different directions on this album, some of the best tracks Helloween have ever done."

"THIS RECORD GOT ME INTO METAL'S MELODIC SIDE"
M SHADOWS, AVENGED SEVENFOLD

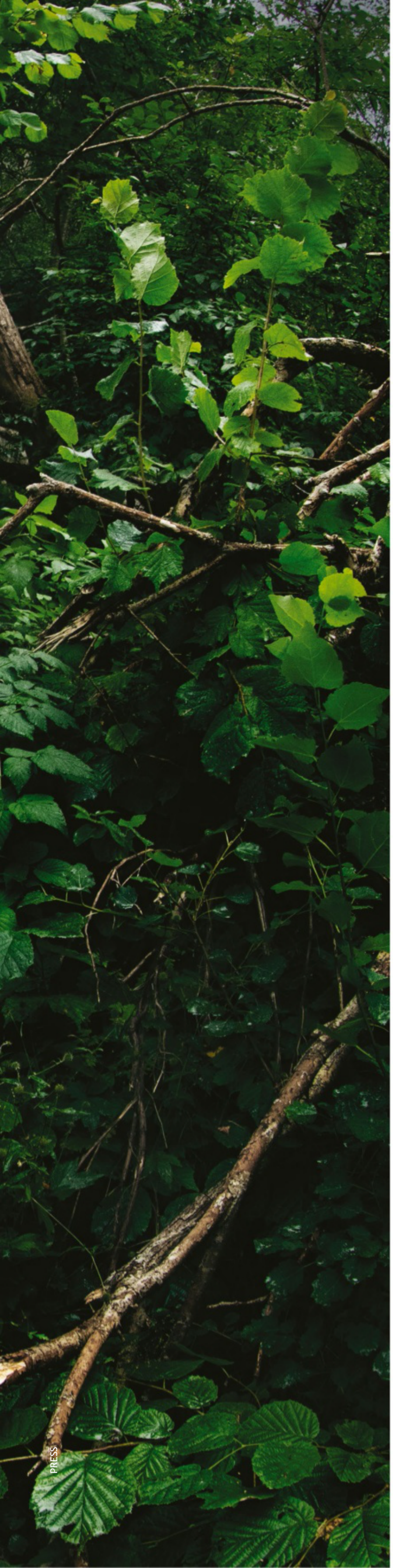
In 2019, Michael Weikath credits Queen, Sparks, Uriah Heep, Rainbow, Deep Purple and ELO among the inspirations for the album's symphonic urges, as well as an even older scene: "Kai Hansen had a lot of classic and opera music from his mother, like Bach and Beethoven we listened to. I have Smetana and I'm a big fan of Haydn. And I wanted to have something like an old Hollywood choir to use on some songs."

When *Keeper II* emerged in August 1988, Helloween were just embarking on a dream-ticket tour with Iron Maiden, kicking off with the opening slot at the Monsters Of Rock Festival, Castle Donington, in front of 85,000 rabid headbangers. They were on the path to glory. But when Kai said *I Want Out*, he wasn't kidding; he'd left by the end of the year, to form Gamma Ray (another of Germany's greatest bands), while changing musical fashions mitigated against Helloween's ascendancy. But with *Keeper Of The Seven Keys Part II*, Helloween laid a powerful claim on music history.

HELLOWEEN RELEASE LIVE ALBUM, BLU-RAY AND DVD *UNITED ALIVE/UNITED ALIVE IN MADRID* ON OCTOBER 4, VIA NUCLEAR BLAST

ALAMY

Helloween: keepers of the No.1 spot in our list



Stockholm Syndrome

Mikael Åkerfeldt had no urge to make a new Opeth album. Then he decided to record one entirely in Swedish. *Then* he did it in English, too. What the hell is going on?

WORDS: CHRIS CHANTLER

Once upon a time, circa 1995–2008, Opeth were one of the world's most adventurous and acclaimed death metal bands. With some of Sweden's darkest riffs and one of the greatest growls in the business, they gradually became a quirky cult favourite among headbangers looking for something more offbeat and cerebral than workaday brutality. *Blackwater Park*, 2001's breathtaking opus, was both a breakthrough and a high watermark of contemporary extreme metal, and the rest of the decade saw the band crystallise their unique prog-death sound and enjoy far greater success than many imagined possible.

Seventies progressive rock was always crucial to Opeth's frontman and guiding light, Mikael Åkerfeldt – he was namedropping Camel in interviews as early as 1995 – and the then-unfashionable influence gave the band the twist that got them noticed. But few were prepared for the patchouli-scented hippy vibes to kick death metal out of bed forever on 2011's *Heritage*. Eight years on, the turbulent distortion and deathly roar remain things of the past, Opeth still comfortably clamped to the prog bosom. Yet concerts in such high-capacity venues as Wembley, not to mention the turnout for their set at Download's second stage this year, indicate that fans of heavy music have not abandoned the ex-metal legends – even if many of them still yearn to hear Mikael roar once more on an Opeth LP.

"I find it interesting that 11 years after we did *Watershed*, the last death metally Opeth record, people are still talking about it," begins Mikael. "We do play those songs live, I love them and I'm proud of them, and I appreciate that people liked it so much they're going to keep pestering me for another five years or whatever!"

But he's not going back. With Opeth's 13th album, *In Cauda Venenum*, the band continue refining and mellowing their dextrous, time-warped melodic prog, Mikael taking the eccentricity further with the decision to sing the whole album in Swedish. "I always need some kind of idea to get me going, and this time around it was the language idea," he explains, somewhat cryptically.

Mikael hadn't been planning to write an Opeth album anytime soon. "I was going on a sabbatical," notes the frontman. "I gave fair warning [to my label and bandmates] that I was needed at home with my kids. But they go off to school every day, and my girlfriend goes off to work or study, so I found I have to do something or I feel useless." He chuckles. "So, shall I do the dishes, vacuum the house, mow the lawn, play with the cat, polish the silver…?"

Then one day, after all the chores were done, Mikael popped into his home studio, just to check if he "remembered how everything works". While there, he ended up rediscovering his sense of purpose and self, and *In Cauda*

Opeth: putting the rock in prog rock

The Swedish Thing

Why use TripAdvisor when Mikael Åkerfeldt can help? Here's his pick of what to see in Stockholm

STORKYRKAN, OLD TOWN

"I have been into the Great Church a million times; it's still fucking lovely. If you're a death metalhead you'll get shitloads of inspiration! There's so much death in there, it's beautiful."

MOSEBACKE, SODERMALM

"[This area] overlooks the whole city, as high up as you can get. Great if you're a sniper! They have a great microbrewery, and restaurants where they have jazz and blues bands."

NOSTALGIPALATSET, VASASTAN

"It's the biggest record shop in Sweden – only vinyl, no CDs, but they carry vintage toys and movie posters. Good prices, good staff; a great watering hole for vinyl buffs!"

SOFO, SODERMALM

"If you wanna check out hipsters, this is the place to hang. They have beards and monocles, you can see them on penny-farthings! Young, privileged assholes, but they make good beer."

NOELS BAR, SODERMALM

"Noels Bar plays great soul music, and Noel is a really friendly guy. It's where all the metal kids hang out to escape metal kids. And the stars hang there. Well, me. I hang there!"

PRESS

Venenum was set in motion. "Lo and behold, I started to write music," he continues. "And it was fun – I felt like I matter, I am someone and I know how to do something. So I ended up writing this album for leisure. It's the best time I've had writing an album ever. The pressure wasn't there, the bank balance was alright, it was a labour of love."

Paradoxically, after having his 'language idea', Mikael was inspired to write all the music before contemplating any lyrics. This might suggest that *In Cauda Venenum* fits into a Swedish musical tradition, but the album's rich, orchestral, Arcadian atmospheres have a very English feel.

"I'm an Anglophile in many ways, especially when it comes to music; half of my record collection is limey stuff," Mikael enthuses. "Everything originated from here, in a way – although the blues boom was stolen! The folk scene, prog, heavy metal, singer/songwriter, all that stuff… I am well into the UK scene! So it wasn't necessarily a Swedish-sounding record in terms of the music – although Swedish folk music has always been with us, since the debut."

When *Hammer* mentions the 70s London art-prog collective Renaissance as a pointer to the record, Mikael explodes with glee. "I love you for mentioning Renaissance! What a band, my god! Nobody's said that to me, and fuck yeah, I played the shit out of those records. *A Song For All Seasons* [their eighth album, released in 1978], my god, there is no more epic record than that! It's got a very big, pompous, pastoral type of vibe, I love that album…"

The animated bandleader stops mid-gush and archly recalibrates: "Shit, I'm not happy anymore, I'm thinking people are going to trace it back and see where I got everything from, and that's Renaissance!"

Mikael's wry self-deprecation gives us perhaps a little glimpse of the anxiety that caused him to record an English-language version of the album at the last minute – translating lyrics a day before recording them. "I got a bit insecure, I guess," the frontman confesses. "I was so happy with the music, I thought it would be a shame if some people passed on this record just because of the language barrier. I have to say, I was one of those people who had problems with languages I couldn't understand in music; with early Italian prog, I kind of waited with that scene, I wasn't ready I guess, but then I realised I could have missed out on lots of great music."

Making the Anglicised edition, Mikael was careful to keep the same vocal lines, even matching up the vowel sounds to make it as close as possible to what he regards as the definitive recording. "The main version is the Swedish version," he asserts. "Some people will check out both, I guess. People are asking me, 'Why the English version?' as opposed to 'Why the Swedish version?', which is interesting!"

To a monolingual English listener, there is something beguiling about Swedish-language Opeth; it has some arcane and exotic quality, forcing you to focus on sounds and rhythms without being distracted by meanings. It feels incredibly cohesive as a result, and the process of writing in his mother tongue has had a profound impact on Mikael's lyrical themes.

"I love the English language. Most of my English lyrics are embellished by beautiful – but I mean *beautiful* – English words. I'll write a line around a particular word, but I couldn't do that anymore, because we don't have any beautiful Swedish words. I couldn't hide behind them, so they came out differently. All of a sudden I'm writing about [Sweden's 2018] election!" he laughs. "It's weird, but they're more interesting because of that. There's more substance to them, they're more edgy, more funny. I had a good time writing the lyrics, actually!"

"WRITING IN SWEDISH HAS MADE MY LYRICS MORE EDGY"

MIKAEL ÅKERFELDT

It's certainly a much more intimate affair, with spoken word samples from the frontman's children ("My son asked, 'Am I gonna be famous now?'"

chuckles Mikael), and there's a relaxed playfulness best exemplified by Mikael jauntily singing along to the solo at the end of *Banemannen / The Garotter*, a cute technique forming a link back to his own childhood.

"It's some kind of scat," he explains. "Camel have done it, but I first heard it in a Swedish children's show. We had a band here called Made In Sweden; the guitarist is a famous session player, and he used to do it in this show that I watched as a kid. I always thought that was cool, and I still think it's cool! The rest of the song is so dark and intense that I wanted the ending to be more of an uplifting kind of thing. But I can assure you that song will be hated by fans. The backlash for that bit alone is going to be massive!"

As this comment suggests, Mikael is keenly aware of the division that exists within Opeth's fanbase. Some will be mad or sad to hear the band continue down their 70s prog rabbit-hole, getting more pastoral and mellow instead of busting out the frosty Swedish death metal again. Mikael slyly pre-empts the question with a gamut of possible futures.

"Return of the growl? Maybe. Maybe not. Possibly. Probably not. Never gonna happen, ever? I don't know. If I want to. I'm not going to say, like Bob Marley, that they're 'waiting in vain'; it's just not really in me anymore. I shaped my death metal vocal technique around not really hearing what the fuck I was doing! Then live technology developed so that I could hear everything perfectly, which didn't really help me at the beginning, but I'm getting better."

Such sensitivity to his own perceived shortcomings is one reason that Opeth continue making music of such consistently high quality. Having created this album for fun when no one was looking, it seems likely that Mikael will have another go at a sabbatical when he gets the chance. He sounds relaxed but sharp, contented but self-critical, and he's clearly loving family life; asked about future ambitions, Mikael spots the opportunity for a bit of bathos and Swedish understatement. "Right now my only ambition is to eat lunch," he deadpans. "Musical ambitions, I have none, because I'm still clinging on to that last experience of writing and recording this record. But I'm sure new dreams will come…" H

***IN CAUDA VENENUM* IS OUT ON SEPTEMBER 27 VIA MODERBOLAGET / NUCLEAR BLAST. OPETH TOUR THE UK IN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER – SEE P.109 FOR DATES**

MOTÖRHEAD

In 1979, Motörhead's career began to take off in style. *Hammer* veteran Malcolm Dome recalls the effect it all had on their talismanic frontman

WORDS: MALCOLM DOME

SHUTTERSTOCK

MOTÖRHEAD

Motörhead's Fast Eddie, Philthy and Lemmy on *Top Of The Tops*, 1979

Lemmy Kilmister is not in a good mood.

It's December 1979 and I'm in the offices of Greybray, Motörhead's management. I've just told the man that I'm reviewing the *On Parole* album for weekly music magazine *Record Mirror*. This was the first album the band recorded in 1975, but it was shelved by their then-label United Artists, and was only just about to come out – finally.

"So, what? Why should I care if you're reviewing it?" snaps Lemmy, adding a hard stare. He realises that maybe he's being a little harsh, so offers: "Listen, United Artists hated what we recorded, decided not to release the album, dropped Motörhead, and forgot about us. Now, because we've had a little success they're trying to make money on the back of that. They didn't even tell me it was coming out!"

Lemmy is coming to terms with the reality that the band are now getting people's attention. The fact that both *Overkill* and *Bomber* had made the Top 30 in the UK album charts highlighted that the trio had commercial potential, and the title tracks from each album had been Top 40 singles. Motörhead even appeared on *Top Of The Pops*, which amused Lemmy.

"I got the idea for *Bomber* from a novel I read, called *Bomber* [by Len Deighton]. It's about a bombing raid over Germany during World War II. And we got to play it on *Top Of The Pops,*" he says. "We'd done it before for *Overkill* and *Louie Louie*, but they didn't much like having us on. We don't fit in with the sort of tame, inoffensive musicians they're used to having. But I love the fact the audience don't know how to react to us. You can see them getting confused at the front! Ha ha!"

It had been something of a landmark year for Motörhead. They had begun it having just signed to Bronze Records, but if anyone was under the illusion that the bassist/vocalist was in a positive frame of mind about things, then he quickly dispelled this one night in January at renowned London after-hours rock bar, Frank's Funny Farm.

This writer witnessed someone asking Lemmy how the recording for the new album, which would be *Overkill*, was progressing. The response?

"How should I fucking know? You can never tell what anything sounds like until it's finished. What a daft question!"

Lemmy wasn't angry. He just wasn't prepared to indulge anyone. This person was interrupting his social activities, and that was unforgivable. It was also typical of his forthright manner.

AC/DC frontman Bon Scott told me later that year: "I like Lemmy, because he's straightforward. He shakes your hand, looks you in the eye and tells you what's on his mind. I'm sure we'd work well together. There'd be the occasional punch-up, but then we'd go to the bar, have a few and all would be forgotten."

Overkill was released in March '79, and it was immediately obvious that the band had stepped up to another level compared to their self-titled debut, which had come out two years earlier through the Chiswick label. It reached No.24 in the UK chart and got a positive reaction all round. Finally, there was cohesion and purpose to what the threesome were doing.

The band had already played six of these songs at the end of 1978 on their Beyond The Threshold Of Pain tour, and on March 23, 1979, they went on a 20-date headlining British tour, performing at various times no fewer than nine tracks from the album. The only song not in the set was *I'll Be Your Sister*. Motörhead ended this part of the tour with a show at The Paris Theatre in London on May 26, recorded by the BBC.

Following the success of *Overkill*, Bronze demanded another album, and Lemmy was soon back in the studio working on what would become *Bomber*. He later felt that it suffered from being rushed, and although producer Jimmy Miller was a superstar who'd co-produced *Overkill* and worked with the Stones, he was known for having a heroin problem. While Lemmy was never a stranger to drugs, he took music very seriously and demanded total commitment to Motörhead.

"We did things differently with *Bomber*," said Lemmy in 1979. "Usually, we get the chance to perform songs live before going into the studio to record. But for some reason we didn't do it this time. Maybe it's because we were being hassled by Bronze to get another album done fast, as *Overkill* had done well.

"I wish we'd told the label to fuck off and leave us alone. If you listen to *Bomber*, the songs don't have the edge they have when we do them live. For me, the production is a bit too smooth. I can't say it's an album I am happy with. The songs are all good, but Jimmy Miller… well, we made the mistake of letting him do what he wanted without arguing. Sure, *Bomber* sold well. But I doubt we'll work with Jimmy again. He has his own demons to deal with, and it made him difficult and unreliable."

Bomber came out on October 27, just seven months after *Overkill*, and did even better as it peaked at No.12 in the British chart. It was favourably received,

but many believed it wasn't as good as its predecessor. Still, it did further mark out the band as being different to the likes of Judas Priest, Black Sabbath and Rush who were in the ascendant at the time. Motörhead possessed a refreshing honesty and energy, and seemed to be more in step with the likes of Saxon and Iron Maiden, who were emerging as NWOBHM began to bloom. Like AC/DC, they were down to earth and had a streetwise groove that appealed to the new generation of metalheads.

They did a 30-date UK tour, with the famous 40-foot Bomber as a big attraction, and performed six songs from the new album.

Lemmy was always determined that people shouldn't see Motörhead as being involved with any trend of the period.

"I don't feel we're part of any movement," he said. "Some people have called us punks and others refer to us as being a heavy metal band. But I just think what we do is rock'n'roll, nothing else. When you listen to *Bomber*, does it sound to you like punk or heavy metal? The thing is that we attract lots of different types of fans. Come to a Motörhead gig and you'll see long hairs and short hairs all mingling. I like to think we appeal to those who like proper music, with no gimmicks. That's what the three of us do – we work fucking hard at making this band as good as it can be."

Despite Lemmy's claims of harmony between the fans, there were problems at the Reading festival when Motörhead appeared on August 24, 1979. Sporadic fighting broke out between the band's fans and those of punks Punishment Of Luxury, but that has always been put down to boredom rather than genuine animosity. Incidentally, Lemmy et al were third on the bill, behind The Tourists and The Police, and following The Cure and Wilko Johnson. However, there was no doubt which band got the biggest reception of the day – Motörhead!

"I WISH WE'D TOLD THE LABEL TO FUCK OFF"

LEMMY

Nobody had ever given the trio any handouts. They'd worked hard and fought for everything they'd achieved. Their debut show was opening for progressive band Greenslade at The Roundhouse in London on July 20, 1975, and the following March, on the band's first headlining tour of the UK, they were playing small venues like The Music Machine in London and Tiffany's in Bristol. By the end of 1979, Motörhead were headlining bigger venues such as the famed Hammersmith Odeon, where they did two sold-out nights.

"When we first started, someone said we were the worst band in the world. Now, I like to believe we are so much better at being that 'bad'. If you want pretty boys playing inoffensive music, go listen to The Police. We're loud and rowdy, it's the only way we know how to be. But we are also very good at playing our instruments. Just because we have our amps turned right up doesn't mean we're trying to hide our lack of talent behind a wall of noise. We can definitely play. This is a serious band."

One of the main motivations that drove Lemmy on during this period was his determination to prove people wrong. "I want to shove our music in the faces of all those muthafuckers who said we were a waste of time. Is that me being vindictive? Yes, it is. But I'm fed up with know-nothing music industry arseholes who think they know what good music is. They're the sort who'd have told Little Richard he was wasting his time when he first started."

He also got irked when it was assumed he was rich, because the band had

SHUTTERSTOCK

Time to play! Motörhead on a playground ramp in Islington, London in December 1980

two charting albums and a couple of singles that had sold well in 1979. It's passed into legend that Ian Kilmister got his nickname of 'Lemmy' from a habit of borrowing money, and I got to witness first-hand the man in action.

In June 1979, I was in his manager Doug Smith's office, when Lemmy politely knocked on the door.

"Sorry to interrupt, gentleman, but could you lemme have a fiver, please?" Doug handed over the requisite note, only for the man to add with a glint in his eye, "Actually, can you make it a tenner?" The extra cash changed hands. With that, he left and Doug said, "Now you know why we call him Lemmy!"

The Lemmy of 1979 was no different to the way he was in subsequent years. Articulate, honest and focused, he could as easily be lonely in a crowd as the centre of attention. But he was at his best with real fans. That was underlined in late 1979 when Motörhead, around the period when *Bomber* was released, made an appearance at The Bandwagon Heavy Metal Soundhouse in north-west London, at the time one of the most important and influential rock clubs in the country. Lemmy revelled in being among those who adored the band for the right reason – they loved the music. There was no pretension, no attitude. As far as he was concerned,

"WE'RE LOUD AND ROWDY BUT WE CAN PLAY. THIS IS A SERIOUS BAND"

LEMMY

He always attracted a crowd, and it was interesting to watch one night at London's Music Machine [now Koko] when he bought a round for several people, then told them quite reasonably that he expected them to reciprocate, and he didn't just drink Jack Daniel's and Coke – these were doubles, or triples!

"I'm always happy to get anyone a drink," he said as an aside to a couple of us that night, which was October 16, when NWOBHM band Samson were playing. "But everyone assumes I'm some rich pop star now. That's not how it works. I have a little cash, but I'm not exactly Mick Jagger."

this was a meeting between likeminded people, all devoted to the glory of music.

"This is what it's all about," he said. "Everyone's just out to have a good time, and that's what I'm all about as well. If we can put smiles on faces, we've done our job."

***MOTÖRHEAD 1979*, A DELUXE SET OF *OVERKILL* AND *BOMBER*, IS OUT OCTOBER 25 VIA BMG. BOTH COME AS HARDBOUND BOOKPACKS IN 2CD AND 3LP FORMAT, WITH PREVIOUSLY UNHEARD CONCERTS AND INTERVIEWS, AND PHOTOS**

"There was half a bloody pig's head in there!"

Lemmy's colleagues and friends tell their favourite stories…

Former Bronze A&R Howard Thompson on… Lemmy's first meeting with him

"He unrolls his shirtsleeve, revealing a bag of a white-ish powder, into which he sticks the business end of a switchblade and draws it out – the tip full of what I figure is amphetamine sulphate and holds it under my nose. 'Snort that,' he commands. This gets repeated for the other nostril and when that's done, I make a move to step inside but, 'Hold it,' he growls, then fetches a tall can of Carlsberg Special Brew, hands it to me and orders, 'Drink that… all of it… now!'"

Music journalist Kris Needs on… Lemmy's songwriting

"The first time I heard *Overkill* was on the big speakers in the studio surrounded by Motörhead, and I've never been the same since. There was also Lemmy's thing of going in the loo to write, he turned that into a fine art. He'd sit on the bog in the studio cackling his head off, and you could hear him writing something like *Limb From Limb*. He'd come out of the bog and go, 'Right, listen to this!'"

Girlschool's Kim McAuliffe on… Lemmy's Overkill tour prank

"Lemmy was hanging around longer than usual, before we went onstage at one gig. He eventually went and I opened my guitar case and I screamed! I thought it was a human hand, but it was a pig's ear sticking up and half a bloody pig's head in there. Tim, our roadie at the time, just got it in a tea towel and knocked on their dressing room door, like, 'I think this belongs to you.' Lemmy was pissed off that he wasn't there to see it."

Ex tour-manager Graham Mitchell on… Lemmy's debauchery

"I remember Finland's Punkaroka Midnight Sun Festival. We got thrown into jail. Fans had been drinking homemade vodka, which was lethal stuff. We'd been given some and we were told it is 186 proof. We had a caravan on site, and we got just more and more drunk as the day wore on. They played a good gig, but were pissed off with the sound. We went back to the hotel, and it was fucking debauchery. Hotel was trashed, beds in the lake… When we went through customs, all the Motörhead people were handed over to the police. We were told that we had damages to pay for the hotel. And for destroying the caravan. Everything we were paid was taken off us but not before we spent a week in the police station being fed pea soup every fucking day. I was stuck in a cell with Lem. It was hell."

Peter Hook on… Lemmy's bass tone

"When New Order did *Power, Corruption & Lies*, we were in Pink Floyd's studio, Britannia Row in London, and the previous band had left a strip of tape on the desk with all their channel markings on it. On like 18, 19, 20, 21 it said 'Lemmy', and I said, 'What the fuck is this?' The engineer said, 'Oh, Motörhead were just in.' I said, 'So these four channels must be the bass channels?' He said, 'Yeah,' and I said, 'Right, I'm going to do this, I'm gonna sound like Lemmy!' So we got all set up, and I was so excited, got the speakers set up, same mics, ready for this massive reveal, and oh my God it sounded shite. I don't know what the fuck he did but I was unable to recreate it."

GETTY
INTERVIEWS FROM THE BOX SET BY: MÖRAT, NEIL PERRY, STEFFAN CHIRAZI,

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THE REVIEWS

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EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURE: JAMES SHARROCK

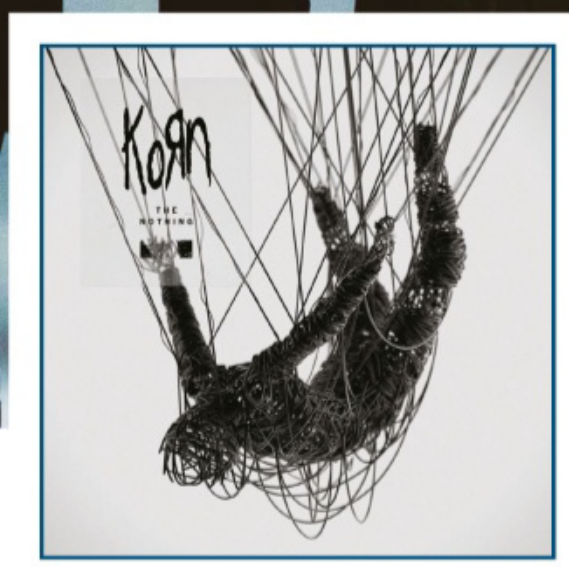
Korn welcome you to their circus of personal horrors

KORN

The Nothing

ROADRUNNER

Jonathan Davis exorcises his most ferocious demons yet



KORN HAVE MADE a career from exposing the chaos and darkness inside their collective psyche, but, even by their combustible standards, the last year has been unbelievably traumatic with the passing of Jonathan Davis's wife, Deven, in August last year. Davis has never been one to hide his emotions, a quality that originally set his band apart from so many metal bands of the early 90s, but as their career has progressed Korn have managed to find a way to open up to other moods and themes – an evolution that's sustained their longevity. But, with those events surely playing a part, in *The Nothing* we have another record that captures the pitch-black, often harrowing honesty of Korn's early material. Although it might sound trite to say it, Davis can be proud of the way he has channelled himself to create a powerhouse of an album. From 90-second opener *The End Begins,* we're left in no doubt that this album will be a traumatic experience, the intro consisting almost exclusively of haunting bagpipes and Jonathan screaming through inconsolable tears.

As the next few tracks prove, Davis has hugely developed as a vocalist, with both *Cold* and *You'll Never Find Me* showcasing the brutal, death metal growl he has been perfecting alongside his trademark croon. At the end of the latter track we hear him breaking down in the studio, and the howls of pain feel undeniably real. The band have upped their game a few notches, too; Korn spend the first half of the album sounding discordant, tar-thick and laying down relentlessly suffocating grooves. Brian 'Head' Welch and James 'Munky' Shaffer's guitars are tonally

KORN HAVE RECAPTURED THAT UNIQUE FEELING OF GENUINE DARKNESS

PRESS/BRIAN ZIFF

perfect, and Fieldy's bass remains as bowel-loosening as ever, but it's Ray Luzier who plays the blinder here; his kinetic way of utilising his entire kit propels Korn and confirms his place as this band's definitive drummer.

Korn are far from a one-trick pony; there are electronic and industrialised throbs all over the creeping *Can You Hear Me*. It's clear, though, that *The Nothing* is Davis's album. Much of the explicit gothic noir that infiltrates *The Seduction Of Indulgence* or the cold, post-punk opening of *Finally Free* feels like tricks that the vocalist tried out on last year's solo album, *Black Labyrinth*, with the music mirroring his tour of his own personal demons. On the excellent *Idiosyncrasy* he screeches *'God is making fun of me, he's up there laughing, I can see'* though gritted teeth and you can feel every ounce of his pain surge through your body.

The Nothing is as powerful as this band have felt in a very long time. *'For every good thing I do there is a price to pay'* he sings on closer *Surrender To Failure*, and only those with a heart of stone would struggle to empathise with him. Korn have been on a run of form over the last decade, but no one could have predicted that they would recapture that unique feeling of genuine darkness. Unfortunately it's taken something deeply and tragically sad for that to happen, but Davis can take a crumb of solace that his catharsis here will almost certainly inspire many more people to fight their own demons once again.

FOR FANS OF: **NIN, Deftones, Slipknot**

STEPHEN HILL

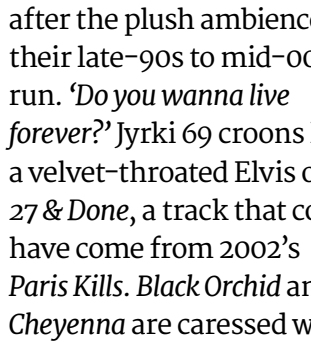
THE 69 EYES
West End
NUCLEAR BLAST

Helsinki vampires tap a deep, rich well once more

Anyone who thought The 69 Eyes sounded a tad anaemic on 2016's *Universal Monsters* will be pleased to hear that they've regained their bite. The Helsinki vampires' 12th studio album shimmers with cold, dark energy and will satiate fans hankering after the plush ambience of their late-90s to mid-00s run. *'Do you wanna live forever?'* Jyrki 69 croons like a velvet-throated Elvis on *27 & Done*, a track that could have come from 2002's *Paris Kills*. *Black Orchid* and *Cheyenna* are caressed with deft, Sisters Of Mercy-esque morbidity, but Two *Horns Up* and *The Last House On The Left*, which feature delicious turns from Dani Filth and Wednesday 13 respectively, ooze with the Mötley Crüe goth'n'roll glam of The Eyes' recent work.

FOR FANS OF: **Sisters Of Mercy, Type O Negative, The Cult**

DANNI LEIVERS



THE AGONIST
Orphans
RODEOSTAR

Canadian metallers go on a wild, eclectic ride

Flicking through metal subgenres like they were pages of a gripping novel, The Agonist's sixth album is the Canadians' most diverse yet. Pitting the Mötley Crüe-esque contagion of *Mr. Cold* against the djenty bite of T*he Killing I* is no mean feat, swiftly cast aside by the emotional melodic metalcore of *As One We Survive* while the power metal *The Gift Of Silence* towers overhead. *'What good is this land if one day it's all gone?'* cries the gothic *Blood As My Guide* before the death metal *Dust To Dust* flips proceedings into the blackened *A Devil Made Me Do It*. With frontwoman Vicky Psarakis showcasing her stellar, versatile chops surrounded by phenomenal guitar solos throughout, *Orphans* proves no metal strain is safe from The Agonist.

FOR FANS OF: **In This Moment, Lacuna Coil, Epica**

ALI COOPER

ACID REIGN
The Age Of Entitlement
DISSONANCE

UK thrash legends return from the wastes to thrash some more

Of all the bands that emerged from the 80s UK thrash scene, Acid Reign were the most exuberant. The arrival of their third full-length, a mere 29 years after the last one, already feels like a shot in the arm before the furious riffs of *The New Low* kick in. Although only vocalist Howard 'H' Smith remains from the old days, *The Age Of Entitlement* nails the vibe and energy of the band's earlier line-ups perfectly, with the added bonus of a crunchy and punchy modern production. Brimming with disdain for the modern age, songs like *#newagenarcissist* and *Sense Of Independence* are as pertinent and memorable as anything from three decades ago. This is a belligerent, no-nonsense comeback to be cherished.

FOR FANS OF: **Xentrix, Death Angel, Anthrax**

DOM LAWSON

Asagraum: very soon you will know them well

ASAGRAUM

Dawn Of Infinite Fire

EDGED CIRCLE

Dutch black metallers weave potent new magick from the old school

OCCASIONALLY YOU MIGHT discover an album that is so cosmically transcendent and so deeply evocative that it changes the way you see music. In these rare and revelatory moments, you'll experience it as a profound psychic communication that resonates long after the music ends. Many are sure to enter this cryptic realm through the nine-track black metal odyssey that is *Dawn Of Infinite Fire*.

The follow-up to Asagraum's 2017 debut, *Potestas Magicum Diaboli*, *Dawn Of Infinite Fire* sees the Dutch duo (who feature a third, live member) paying reverential tribute to the Satanic black metal of the 90s. It's both a ritualistic homage to that movement's ragged spirit and a devastating modern update. Roaring with frosty blackened riffage and a siege of blastbeats, tracks like *Abomination's Altar* and *Hate Of Satan's Hammer* elevate the old Norwegian style with electrifying potency, and the pace never relents. With her dizzying volleys of tremolo picking and demoniacal shrieks, vocalist/guitarist/bassist Obscura has conjured an immersive sound that's darkly compelling.

Thankfully, *Dawn...* sidesteps the by-numbers formula that others have followed to lacklustre effect. Top to bottom, each track erupts with a raging vitality and, within the confines of traditional black metal, an impressive array of modes and styles. *Beyond The Black Vortex* forges a blasphemous alliance between the opening creeping atmospherics and the maelstrom of chaotic riffs that drive the song to its neck-snapping conclusion. Closer *Waar Ik Ben Komt De Dood* ('Where I Am, Death Comes'), with its duelling clean and BM vocal styles, strikes a captivating balance between its sorrowful melodies and the terrifying potency of the fretwork. Mention must also be made of both the powerhouse production and the jaw-dropping precision of A's drumming. Teeming with exhilarating riffs, ambitious songwriting and highly technical musicianship, *Dawn...* succeeds at every turn. An instant classic.

FOR FANS OF: Necrophobic, Watain, Wiegedood

JOE DALY

ASTROSAUR

Obscuroscope

PELAGIC

Nordic stoner rockers take the high, and the low road

Combining fuggy, stoner vibes with nerve-jangling virtuosity, Norway's Astrosaur definitely earn their name, managing to play knuckle-dragging primitivism off against stargazing future vision. Guitar heroics jounce up against walls of fuzzed-out riffs while tempos shift and drums clatter away – all of which suggests *Obscuroscope* is the product of three supremely talented musos who have as much love for Kyuss as they do for Miles Davis. If there's a problem, it's how you should *respond* – do you offer up some sweaty headbanging or a bout of thoughtful chin-stroking followed by polite applause? We're sure we'll figure it out, but either way the band are due some considerable kudos.

FOR FANS OF: Mastodon, Stinking Lizaveta, From Monument To Masses

ALEX DELLER

BETRAYING THE MARTYRS

Rapture

SUMERIAN

Anglo-Gallic metalcore ruffians turn up the flames

Those familiar with the symphonic-tinged, blackened metalcore of this Anglo-French crew will already have a pretty good idea of what to expect on this follow-up to 2017's *The Resilient*. Rising waves of synth-laden electronica create a darkened ambience before *Eternal Machine* and *Parasite* unleash barrages of punishing riffs and crushing grooves as those hallmark anthemic choruses and soaring cleans offset the downtuned clamour. What's less expected is how pissed off BTM sound here. Aaron Matts furiously roars through *Incarcerated*, its lyrical menace dragging you down the deepest, darkest rabbit hole imaginable. *Rapture* may not offer a religious experience, but its fury and renewed verve continue to impress.

FOR FANS OF: Veil Of Maya, Born Of Osiris, Make Them Suffer

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

BLACK STAR RIDERS

Another State Of Grace

NUCLEAR BLAST

Thin Lizzy-aligned rockers reaffirm their songcraft mastery

The Thin Lizzy offshoot return with a new album and two new members, but it's the rugged swagger and bourbon-soaked vocals of Ricky Warwick that still anchor the sound. Rousing, introspective and at times sharply political, *Another State...* showcases the same rich variety of 2017's *Heavy Fire*, from the ramshackle stomp of the title track to the sizzling metal riffage of *In The Shadow Of the War Machine*, to the spare acoustic balladry of *Why Do You Love Your Guns?* More of an extension of its predecessor than a fresh update, the new album delivers precisely what we've come to expect: bullshit-free, guitar-powered rock'n'roll.

FOR FANS OF: The Wildhearts, Stone Gods, The Answer

JOE DALY

BLOOD RED THRONE
Fit To Kill
MIGHTY MUSIC

Norwegian death metallers reaffirm their credentials

Having unleashed a wave of deathly extremity for nearly two decades, Norway's Blood Red Throne are well versed in churning out reliably monstrous records. Following 2016's stellar *Union Of Flesh And Machine* is no easy feat, yet from the onslaught of opener *Requiem Mass*, *Fight To Kill* lives up to its billing with sadistic intent, as the musicians lay down a perilous aura added to by vocalist Yngve 'Bolt' Christiansen mixing up his guttural growls with eerie screams. *Bloodity* and *WhoreZone* mix up meat'n' potatoes chugging with fiendish riffery, the frenzied initial blasting of *InStructed InSanity* and *Skyggemannen* sets you up for more teeth-rattling blows, while the rampaging *Killing Machine Pt.2* and *Movement Of The Parasites* are as memorable as they are maniacal. This is how death metal should be done.

FOR FANS OF: Bloodbath, Cannibal Corpse, Bolt Thrower

ADAM REES

BORKNAGAR
True North
CENTURY MEDIA

Norse blackened prog lords shift shape and shine

Øystein Brun's blackened prog squad have amassed an extraordinary catalogue over the last 24 years. The band's 11th album has much to live up to; 2016's *Winter Thrice* was a widely hailed career highlight, but *True North* is a self-proclaimed and strident rebirth, following a significant line-up shuffle and the departure of co-vocalist Vintersorg. New lead guitarist Jostein Thomassen asserts himself with alacrity throughout, but at heart this is a supremely powerful ensemble performance, as these virtuosos weave extravagant tapestries of arcane riffing, euphoric harmonies and brutish, rhythmic intricacy, each one held together by vocalist ICS Vortex's soaring tenor and barbaric shriek. The final two songs – rampaging prog colossus *Tidal* and the startlingly sweet and simple *Voices* – are as vivid and affecting as anything Borknagar have released. A glowing advert for perpetual evolution, *True North* is a noble addition to a great legacy.

FOR FANS OF: Arcturus, Ne Obliviscaris, Ihsahn

DOM LAWSON

BRUTALITY WILL PREVAIL
Misery Sequence
BDHW

Seasoned Welsh hardcore crew continue to strike their own chord

Brutality Will Prevail have been subverting hardcore's boundaries for years without reaping the plaudits they deserve. Their doom-laden sound pulls together sledgehammer riffery, tar-thick sludge and expansive dynamics, and slabs like the title track and *Deny The Truth* are drenched in oppressive atmospherics and will take your head off. Especially impressive, though, are the final three tracks. *End Of Me*, featuring Counterparts' Brendan Murphy, is built on a Slayer-esque riff and *Breathless*, with its dreamy, clean vocals, is almost Deftones-ian in its design. To top it off, *The Bitter End* is a slow-burning, claustrophobic crawl with frontman Louis Gauthier putting in his best vocal work. Brutality Will Prevail continue to surprise.

FOR FANS OF: Harms Way, Black Sabbath, Incendiary

DANNII LEIVERS

COPPERHEAD
Gazing In The Dark
PTP

Exhilarating, experimental sludge with zero fucks given

This new release from New York label PTP (best known for the experimental electronics of artists such as Yatta, 9T Antiope and Dis Fig) takes a sharp detour into sludgy post-hardcore, and it's a thing of beauty, coupling Copperhead's remastered self-titled debut with brand new set, *Gazing In The Dark*. Given the kinetic energy generated across its 12 tracks, the unprepared listener might be surprised to know that this is the work of two musicians – Richmond, Virginia-based multi-instrumentalist David Leonard with guitarist/bassist Jordan Faett – whose vast, looping riffs are interspersed with fragments of spoken word and jazz, conjuring a sonic landscape that's as unpredictable as it is immersive. Crushingly heavy, conceptually compelling and moshpit-ready, Leonard has forged an atypical sound that's both oppressive and energising.

FOR FANS OF: Godflesh, Helmet, Neurosis

JOSEPH STANNARD

Atlantean Kodex: none more epic

ATLANTEAN KODEX
The Course Of Empire
VÁN

None more epic Bavarians return to conquer

IT'S EASY TO become obsessed with the notion that heavy music needs to continually move forward. It *does*, of course, and a genuinely new strain of metal would be more than welcome at this point, but it's equally important to remember that our beloved genre is instinctively and intrinsically atavistic and the established subgenres that we already have are going nowhere. All we need is for bands to do something extraordinary with those cherished formulae. Luckily, Atlantean Kodex seem incapable of doing much else.

The Germans' third full-length is absurdly grandiose from first to last, with very deliberate and defiant shades of early Manowar, Viking-era Bathory and the refined, progressive classicism of While Heaven Wept. Everything sounds like it's taking place in the midst of a storm-torn battlefield, many centuries ago, galloping horses included. It's overblown, overwrought and truly epic, vocalist Markus Becker's immaculate, operatic performance confirming his right to be regarded as one of the great metal singers of the modern age.

But while *The Course Of Empire* is undoubtedly aimed at fans of heavy metal at its truest, it's also an astonishingly deep and detailed piece of work: a bona fide musical journey with countless emotional peaks. Sonically brutal but endlessly cinematic, songs like *Chariots* blend heavyweight doom, Maiden-like pomp and woozy, blissed-out atmospherics, each exquisitely drawn-out riff leading to a wild, glass-shattering crescendo. The sheer power behind Atlantean Kodex's wall of guitars, the primal but precise thud of the drums and the underlying swell of Neanderthal bottom-end lift even the most prosaic, old-school metal moments to a higher plane of potency. Frankly, if Valhalla is real and we all end up there at some point in the near future, they had better be piping this album through the PA system or Odin will be receiving a very snippy letter.

FOR FANS OF: Manowar, While Heaven Wept, Candlemass

DOM LAWSON

Bæst are setting out on a treacherous journey

BÆST
Venenum
CENTURY MEDIA

Fast-rising Danish death metallers take another dive into Hell

CLEARLY KEEN TO strike while the iron is hot, the self-proclaimed "number one death metal band in Denmark" unveil the sequel to their incendiary debut, *Danse Macabre*, a mere 13 months later. *Venenum* sees them raise the bar while lowering the tone and should help catapult the quintet, who are currently unwitting darlings of their native daytime telly thanks to the fly-on-the-wall documentary series *Den Satans Familie* (you shouldn't need Google Translate to work that one out), to the next level.

Sounding tighter and more muscular after a hectic year spent spilling blood, sweat and tears on the road in pubs and clubs across Europe, album number two continues their examination of Dante's seminal work, *The Divine Comedy*. Intending to drag the listener through their personal hell, each track loosely represents one of the fabled nine circles and offers a fitting and ferocious soundtrack to a plunge into the abyss.

Once again tapping into the evergreen work of Entombed and the Swedish death metal scene as a whole for inspiration, *Venenum* boasts plenty of HM2-pedal-bashing moments, but Bæst have also spread their musical wings further this time around and have embraced more melody and grooves.

Lean in length but weighty in riffs, the rampaging *Vitriol Lament* sets *Venenum*'s stall out strongly as vocalist Simon Olsen threatens to *'Drink your soul like wine'*. The guttural, hulking chug-fest *Gula* is a massive highlight, as is their tribute to the late great Chuck Schuldiner, *As Above So Below*, heaving with fret-wizardry that bears all the hallmarks of the Death maestro. *Sodomize* shows off tub thumper Sebastian Abildsten's considerable chops, while added Bolt Thrower cover *No Guts, No Glory* is suitably savage. Star of the show, though, is the aptly named *Nihil*. Peppered with Slayer and Morbid Angel influences, it boasts a soaring solo Jeff Hanneman would've been proud of and sounds evil as hell.

FOR FANS OF: **Entombed, Bloodbath, Morbid Angel**

EDWIN MCFEE

CULTED
Vespertina Synaxis
SOM/UNDERGROUND ACTIVISTS

Crushing international collective narrow their bleak palette

Canadian/Swedish crew Culted draw on a wide range of styles, from sludge, black metal and industrial to drone, krautrock and psychedelia. 2014's *Oblique To All Paths* saw them merge those disparate sounds into an absorbing whole. This three-song mini-album continues on the same heady course, yet doesn't reveal Culted's full sonic capabilities. Bookended by *A Prayer For Union* and *A Prayer For Emptiness*, the former relies too heavily on soundbites musing on the death of the ego and the latter's an extended droning industrial piece with minimal percussion. Neither really elicit much of a response in comparison to *Dirt Black Chalice*, which grinds with Godflesh-ian menace and pummels like prime Neurosis without sounding derivative of either legendary act due to its strident BM streak.

FOR FANS OF: **Neurosis, Oranssi Pazuzu, Godflesh**

DEAN BROWN

DISILLUSION
The Liberation
PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

German progressive metallers repay their fans' trust

These prog metallers ended their decade-long Odin Sleep in 2016 with the single, *Alea*, which debuted a new line-up and an even more expansive and expressive sound. The quintet have finally followed that up with their third full-length, and for the most part it's worth the wait. Financed by their long-starved fans via Patreon, *The Liberation* is a sonic feast that rewards with repeat plays. At times cinematic (the sprawling *Wintertide* could score a bloody battle in Westeros) and others downright catchy (*Time To Let Go* features some mainstream-bothering vocal melodies), the opus signals a bold new chapter for the reborn band.

FOR FANS OF: **Opeth, Katatonia, Cynic**

EDWIN MCFEE

ECSTATIC VISION
For The Masses
HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

Psychedelic four-piece take a trip of monstrous proportions

A rose-tinted era of herbs and hallucinogens is the backbone of Ecstatic Vision's third album, and if you close your eyes, yeah, it's the early 70s. Flutes and saxophone make just as much impact as synth and guitars, the title track's ramshackle spoken-word and squealing breakdown harking back to times when *The Magic Roundabout*'s writers were allowed anywhere near pen and paper. At 36 minutes this is a succinct, vicarious acid trip of tribal space-rock widdle, but Ecstatic Vision's real strength sits with their Monster Magnetisms. When Doug Sabolik's vocals go full-on Dave Wyndorf during *Like A Freak* and *Grasping The Void*, and when the band applies some grease and follow him, that's when they shine. More of that, please.

FOR FANS OF: **Captain Beefheart, Hawkwind, Monster Magnet**

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

ENDSEEKER
The Harvest
METAL BLADE

Swedish death metal traditionalism... from Hamburg

Following up their 2017 debut album, *Flesh Hammer Prophecy*, Hamburg's Endseeker deliver a bracing foray into Stockholm-style death metal complete with festering guitar tones, wounded-bear vocals and slamming mid-paced riffs. It's nothing groundbreaking but this time the songs are catchier and there's an overall confidence that balances out the lack of originality. *Spiritual Euphoria* packs hook after hook into four minutes without sacrificing any of its savage momentum. Perhaps the reason why so many are revisiting the Sunlight Studio sound – most famously purveyed by Entombed, Dismember and Grave – is that those records have barely dated in almost 30 years. Endseeker siphon off some of that freshness into dynamic compositions that would do their old-school inspirations proud.

FOR FANS OF: Entombed, Dismember, Unleashed

JOSEPH STANNARD

FIREBREATHER
Under A Blood Moon
RIDING EASY

Doom/sludge deliverance from the gutters of Gothenburg

The demise of Galvano has opened up a new opportunity for guitarist/vocalist Mattias Nööjd with Firebreather. The days of progressive rhythms underpinning his doom howl are gone and in its place is a dragging dirge of Crowbar and Pallbearer-inspired breakdowns and melodies. Following up on 2017's eponymous release, *Under A Blood Moon* is a hulking, glacial affair. Opener *Dancing Flames* leads with Nööjd's hellish phlegmatic vocals and nodding riffs, digging deep into the black soil. The same can be heard on the title track but with Axel Wittbeck's percussive thump it's more like a bone-tired fight to the end. *The Siren* offers a moment's respite from the doom fog with a space-creating guitar solo but otherwise Firebreather are as dense and suffocating as sludgy doom gets.

FOR FANS OF: Yob, Monolord, High On Fire

HOLLY WRIGHT

FOSCOR
Els Sepulcres Blancs
SEASON OF MIST

Barcelona's atmospheric voyagers journey further beyond the black

Foscor's seventh album is the second instalment of a planned trilogy that articulates the blessed escapism from reality's vagaries that black metal-infused sound-scapes, when done right, can provide. The band continue to push in an increasingly melodious direction, replacing harsh vocals with baleful, clean-sung lamentations in their Catalonian tongue, instantly adding an exotic air to the soaring chaos of mellifluous opener *Laments*, ever-tempered by the vicious, percussive pace of drummer Jordi F. Unafraid to experiment with grandeur, the epic soloing of *Cel Rogent* exhilarates as the drums accelerate at its pealing apex. It's a successfully repeated trick, the virtuous heights of vocalist Fiar in *Cançó De Mort* providing another precipice to fall off in breathtaking descent. Foscor's pace and percussive savagery provides a much-needed anchor, allowing their progressively emotive subtleties to flourish.

FOR FANS OF: Alcest, Ihsahn, Astronoid

TOM O'BOYLE

.GIF FROM GOD
approximation_of_a_human
PROSTHETIC

Animated mayhem from hardcore's anarchic new generation

The oddly monikered .gif from god may well be known to you from the split EP that brought Vein to the world's attention. *approximation_of_a_human*, though, is of such a high standard that it seems ridiculous that they managed to slip through unnoticed, because this is an endlessly brilliant meld of grindcore and noise-based hardcore. The stop-start, grinding blastbeat that opens *no dude... he STILL likes to spray* is magnificently odd, and quickly develops into a sickly, slide guitar riff that recalls a band like long-forgotten 90s oddities Barkmarket. The rest of the album touches on everyone from Botch to Nasum to Converge to Pig Destroyer to classic Trustkill early metalcore, and at less than half an hour leaves you gagging for more. Another addition to the current roster of shit-hot modern hardcore bands.

FOR FANS OF: Botch, Drowningman, Rotten Sound

STEPHEN HILL

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'

DARKENED
Into The Blackness
EDGED CIRCLE PRODUCTIONS

Featuring members of Memoriam and Funebrarum, Darkened are well-versed in the art of punishing morbidity. Their debut EP is a subtly epic and inventive upgrade for ageless, war-torn death metal filth.

DOM LAWSON

DIE A LEGEND
Winning
LOYAL BLOOD

Will Scandinavia ever tire of giving us excellent hardcore bands? Die A Legend possess all the hallmarks of the fertile Norwegian punk scene, but with an added dose of the weight that post-hardcore punks Breach used to deal in.

STEPHEN HILL

MNRVA
Black Sky
SELF-RELEASED

There's a psychedelic tinge kneading this South Carolina trio's sludge/stoner/doom. Sadly, what's also lingering is jittery inexperience, which mutes the harrowing elements of music best experienced on the brink of collapse.

CONNIE GORDON

RANCHO BIZZARRO
Possessed By Rancho
ARGONAUTO

No vocals, no bullshit; Italian quartet Rancho Bizzarro forge tubby lumps of instrumental stoner rock like Clutch's bluesy best covering Black Sabbath. Twin-leads and drum fills for days, with a vintage *Mad Max* sample to boot.

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

STERLING SERPENT
Sterling Serpent
VÁN

Viscous chunks of dark Americana from these King Dude alumni: *Violet* and *Bones* are like a roots rock Swans, while *Evelyn* is a forlorn campfire hymn, as death echoes across scorched plains in sepia'd slow motion.

DOM LAWSON

SWAMP COFFIN
Flatcap Bastard Features
SELF-RELEASED

The product of trying times and personal tragedy, the Rotherham bruisers' debut EP is a cathartic, head crushing salvo of Crowbar-flavoured sludge. The primal, pummelling *Annihulus* in particular is a big moment for the trio.

EDWIN MCFEE

Cult Of Luna are seeking out new sonic directions

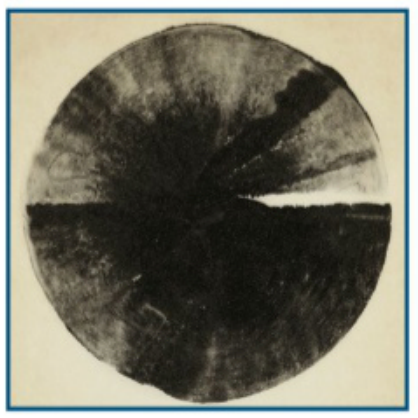
CULT OF LUNA

A Dawn To Fear

METAL BLADE

Umeå's panoramic pioneers enter thrilling new turf

AFTER 21 YEARS, eight albums and what seems like an endless stream of live releases, you'd be forgiven for thinking you might have Cult Of Luna sussed by now. But whether you're a long-time fan, decided to tap out when post-metal got soggy at the edges, or never fully engaged with the band's muscular heave, then it's definitely time to re-engage or reassess, because what's inside album number nine represents something truly startling.



By their own admission a more spontaneous and less carefully plotted release, *A Dawn To Fear* seems to benefit from this more organic and naturalistic approach. Starting with an ominous screech-and-rend before plunging headlong into a riff to die for, 10-minute opener *The Silent Man* sees the band set their stall out with devastating aplomb, with things opening up at one point to allow for some tasteful slide guitar and the soft tinkling of bells.

Elsewhere, the comparative hush of the title track conjures images of skeletal cowboys staring blankly into a guttering campfire while the epic *Nightwalkers* boasts an honest-to-god glowsticks-aloft dance beat that not only makes perfect contextual sense but also provides one of the album's most rousing, standout moments. The organic ebb and flow is complemented by plush organ sounds and warm acoustic instrumentation, allowing the band to explore newfound depths without softening any of the record's seismic blows.

As with 2016's Julie Christmas collaboration, *Mariner*, you truly get that sense that, this late in their much-storied career, COL are undergoing a thrilling second wind that sees them utterly committed to truly testing the boundaries of their art. Sure, we've always known they can crush, that they can exhibit deft textual shifts and that they're masters when it comes to dynamics, but with *A Dawn To Fear* they've shown ever more willingness to punch holes in the fabric of post-metal so that a strange, otherworldly light might shine in.

FOR FANS OF: Amenra, Neurosis, Inter Arma

ALEX DELLER

HARBORLIGHTS

Isolation Ritual

DEATHWISH INC

Atmospheric post-rock from the far shores of Massachusetts

Harborlights' sophomore effort comes with an opening track, *Hold The Dark*, that's akin to a warm embrace, unfurling amongst a heady swirl of delicate melodies and insistent rhythms. The shoegaze-tinged *Eternal Return* ushers you into a shimmering world of introspection, while *From Virtue (Sacrament)* stirs souls with its haunting vocals. *...And Hell Followed's* post-rock discordance and *The Unbearable Lightness Of Being* show that the band have teeth to bare. Tied with pulsating instrumentals that alter the album's pace and atmosphere, *Isolation Ritual* is musically accessible without ever becoming overly polished.

FOR FANS OF: Mogwai, Pelican, Russian Circles

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

HIGH COMMAND

Beyond The Wall Of Desolation

SOUTHERN LORD

Dirty, nefarious thrash with a thirst for the epic

Being signed to Southern Lord instantly confers a level of credibility, but it's not hard to see why the label snapped this lot up. *Beyond The Wall Of Desolation* has unquestionable spiritual links to the malevolence of Slayer and Kreator, but with a palpable debt to black metal and epic doom that makes this much more than just another hipster-friendly thrash record. The finest moments arrive when the band flex their imaginative muscles; the wildly atmospheric *Devoid Of Reality* is a gripping, near-nine-minute slow-mo nightmare, while *Merciless Steel* is a barbarous punch to the gut. The closing title track's explosive tempo shifts and air of grim finality make for a brutally commanding send-off. If you like your thrash with blood on its knuckles, do dive in.

FOR FANS OF: Slayer, Possessed, Power Trip

DOM LAWSON

IMPLORE

Alienated Despair

CENTURY MEDIA

Nomadic hardcore harriers all converge on the sweet spot

Implore's members hail from various European locations and no one stays put in one place long enough to call anywhere home. What's not nearly as unique as their "extreme-nomad-core" status is their sound, which heavily references the last few Converge albums. This shouldn't be interpreted negatively; guitarist Eduard Petrolillio apparently knows Kurt Ballou's tone better than his significant other's erogenous zones, but its the ferociously rock-solid songs that make *Alienated Despair* blossom as minor key dissonance collides with infectious staccato riffing and spring-loaded d-beats on *Parallax*, *Never Again* and *All Is Not Lost Is Long Forgotten* – a title Jacob Bannon is no doubt kicking himself for not coming up with first.

FOR FANS OF: Converge, Trap Them, Black Breath

CONNIE GORDON

IN COLD BLOOD
Legion Of Angels
FAST BREAK!

Metallic hardcore veterans undercut their power with plod

You could almost consider In Cold Blood a supergroup of sorts, with *Legion Of Angels* featuring members of Integrity, Mushroomhead and Ringworm. With that pedigree, you'll not be surprised to hear this is a hugely enjoyable set of old-school metal and hardcore mash-ups, which can go from sounding like Crowbar to Integrity to Sepultura in rapid succession. When they go full aggro and get it really right, like they do on opener *Dark Visions*, they're a match for anyone. It's when they drop the pace for lengthy periods, as on the six-minute-plus plod of *Slipping Into Senility*, that problems arise and they do themselves no favours. Luckily most of the album falls into the former camp rather than the latter, but a little fat-trimming and a commitment to keeping aggression levels high would make *Legion Of Angels* a real rager.

FOR FANS OF: **Integrity, Turmoil, Crowbar**

STEPHEN HILL

IN SEARCH OF SOLACE
Enslaved To Tragedy
SHARPTONE

Minnesota metalcore crew question the art of dying

These Minnesotan metallers dedicate their third album to questioning their genre's fixation with tragedy. *Deathwish* addresses the gritty theme of addiction, drawing from personal experience, littered with chugging guitars aplenty. *Survive* targets isolation through a rare glimpse of Jonny LaDuke's sultry cleans and guttural lows, while *Silent Voices* highlights a feeling of burden amidst glittering moments of cinematic production. Organised fury and well-timed stop-starts pack out *Force Fed*, supported by *Culture Shock*'s industrial grinding riff, while *Left To Dust* delivers a turn to point-blank deathcore rage – *'Don't be surprised when your time has come and you're left to die alone.'* Although ISOS tick off most metalcore clichés along the way and almost lose themselves in the emotional themes they aim to critique, *Enslaved To Tragedy* is a gateway to a big question for metal.

FOR FANS OF: **I Prevail, Miss May I, The Devil Wears Prada**

ALI COOPER

LAGERSTEIN
25/7
KEGSTAND

Australian pirate metallers get drenched with a wench

When drinking holes are cashing in on alcohol-free beverages and extended detoxes are threatening the livelihood of the perennial party-goer, Lagerstein are here to preserve the long-held tradition of booze appreciation. Never mind the pirate schtick they have going on (although the live shows are a blast), *25/7*'s thematic compass points in the direction of the bar, not a buried treasure chest. Speaking of chests, fans of Steel Panther's lad humour will dig the glam rock *Wench My Thirst* with its cheeky reference to bountiful jugs (oi oi!). *Off The Map* has Sabaton all over it then sails over to the highly ahistorical *Aqua Bong* but it's *Shoey Song*, about, ahem, drinking out of a shoe, and the chillaxed reggae curveball *Pina Colada Paradise*, that makes this collection of catchy and convivial stein-clinkers as inviting as a free beach bar at sunset.

FOR FANS OF: **Alestorm, Korpiklaani, Sabaton**

HOLLY WRIGHT

MARS RED SKY
The Task Eternal
LISTENABLE

Holistic psych rockers offer a deep dive for higher adepts

Stoner rock embodies the tension between the sheer potency of pounding, metronomic tempos and the more psychedelic elements of space and melody. Mars Red Sky have ever so gradually migrated from the former towards the latter. On their latest, they reaffirm that direction with a fresh collection of druggy, slow-burning headtrips layered with all of the thick, reverb-drenched riffs and wild melodic foraging that a cosmic voyager could ever want. *Reacts* plays out like a slow, silvery fever dream, with plodding, fuzzed-out power chords floating beneath psychotropic pentatonic contrails. That said, picking out tracks on this album is like trying to differentiate two areas of a swimming pool; it all comes together as a singular experience that needs to be absorbed as a whole to receive the full measure cerebral payload. For dedicated psych-warriors only.

FOR FANS OF: **Samsara Blues Experiment, OM, Sleep**

JOE DALY

Exhorder have found themselves stuck in the same old groove

EXHORDER
Mourn The Southern Skies
NUCLEAR BLAST

Groove metal pioneers deliver a functional if forgettable comeback

WHILST CREDITED WITH creating the groove metal blueprint bands like Pantera later popularised, NOLA powerhouse Exhorder never found the same mainstream success as the acts they inspired, calling it a day after just two albums in the early 90s. In an age of high-profile reunions, it makes sense that they'd want to capitalise on their legacy, but unfortunately *Mourn The Southern Skies* falls just short.

Simultaneously the biggest compliment and criticism here is that this LP could have come directly from 1994, for better or for worse. Picking up directly where 1992's more groove-orientated *The Law* left off, *Mourn...* largely eschews the straight-up thrash of the 1990 debut, *Slaughter In The Vatican*, in favour of muscular Sabbathian licks, taut rhythmic chugging and chest-beating, mosh-ready breakdowns. That isn't to say there aren't thrashier moments here too, like the raging *Ripping Flesh* and *Hallowed Sounds*, a track that pairs frantic palm-muted riffery with a soaring, Alice In Chains-esque chorus.

Unfortunately *Mourn...* resurrects a lot of the worst parts of 90s groove metal too. Lyrical sophistication has never been Exhorder's strong point, but there are some absolute howlers here, which can really distract from the experience, despite the conviction and power Kyle Thomas still wields as a vocalist. The band never really step outside of their own formula, and at almost twice the length of their previous records, *Mourn...* eventually runs out of steam with stodgy cuts like *Rumination* and *The Arms Of Man* bleeding into each other. The closing title track is a genuine surprise – an epic power ballad in the vein of *Cemetery Gates* – but it's too little, too late.

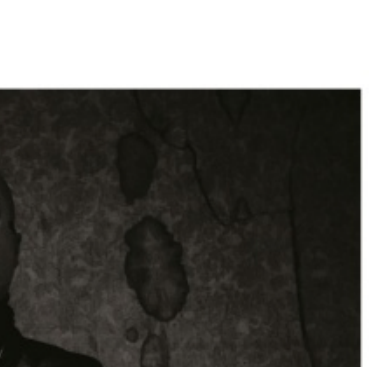
Exhorder's groovier take on thrash has become increasingly saturated over the years, and they themselves don't have too much more to add it here. Diehard fans will find much to enjoy, but it's hard to see the album making much of an impact elsewhere.

FOR FANS OF: **Pantera, Vio-Lence, Lamb Of God**

KEZ WHELAN

GOST
Valediction
CENTURY MEDIA

Synthwave's most extreme adherent unearths fresh new horrors



NOT TOO LONG ago synthwave seemed an intriguing niche – a burgeoning aberration borne of nostalgic predilection for 16-bit videogame soundtracks and John Carpenter movies. In 2019 it risks becoming stuck in its own neon-soaked, dystopian rut, much of the scene content to revel in reminiscence while conforming to an established sonic palette. GosT, while unashamedly born of the same influences, are among the few bold enough to keep fucking with the formula to see what new-form horrors may emerge. As a teenager the Texan producer played in metal bands, extreme metal and Satanic imagery/subject matter becoming increasingly dominant traits that have always set him apart. *Relentless Passing* opens his latest album with industrial-strength blastbeats so intense they punch into electro-noise territories that would make Alec Empire proud. Percussive intensity isn't where the industrial/metal influences stop; the serpentine screech that accompanies *Wrapped In Wax*'s pulsating electro-dance is pitch black in its demonic exhortations. Elsewhere, on the likes of *Bloody Roses*, you could be listening to Depeche Mode, so effective is the combo of dance-pop hooks within svelte, goth environs. *Timeless Turmoil*'s all-consuming sonic intensity is juxtaposed with pared-down electronica, rapidly switching between bacchanalian posturing and uncontrolled rage. *Ligature Marks* combines a static-embattled, mid-paced beat and a rich Peter Steele-esque baritone, breakbeats shattering the repose. *She Lives In Red Light* conforms to standard synthwave tropes, made all the more engrossing for its perpetually unpredictable edge that's becoming ever a more dangerous listen than the majority of GosT's peers.

Valediction is testament not only to black metal's virulent thrall continuing to infect a multitude of musical genres, but to the continuing cross-genre sonic experiments born of the internet age.

FOR FANS OF: Mayhem, Perturbator, Nine Inch Nails

TOM O'BOYLE

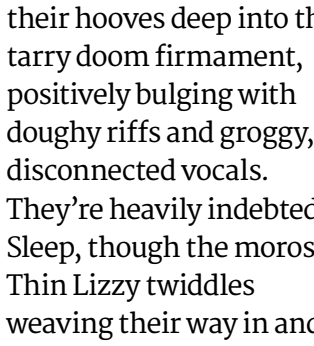
MONOLORD
No Comfort
RELAPSE

Stoner doom crew give themselves a (holy) mountain to climb

Swedish retronauts Monolord have been at it long enough to know exactly what they're doing – an undeniable strength but also their ultimate downfall. For their fourth full-length the band dig their hooves deep into the tarry doom firmament, positively bulging with doughy riffs and groggy, disconnected vocals. They're heavily indebted to Sleep, though the morose Thin Lizzy twiddles weaving their way in and out provide a welcome diversion. If there's plenty here to satisfy the average doom fan that's also rather the problem – it's all finetuned to the point of rote, even down to the existence of a hyper-limited, on-the-nose vinyl edition that's been swaddled in distinctive Orange Amps fabric.

FOR FANS OF: Sleep, Slomatics, Conan

ALEX DELLER



MORTEM
Ravnsvart
PEACEVILLE

Prime Norwegian black metal with a far-reaching pedigree

Norway's Mortem first existed back in 1987. Their 1989 demo, *Slow Death*, was produced by Euronymous and featured artwork from Dead, making it a minor piece of black metal history. More notably, the demo was written by Steinar Johnsen, who made his name in Arcturus, and Marius Vold, also of early Arcturus and Thorns, while Mayhem's Hellhammer handled session drums. 2019 sees the trio return – with 1349's Tor Stavenes joining on bass – for their full-length debut. Informed by the eerie coldness of Thorns, the vast sweep of Bathory or early Enslaved, and the intense precision of latter-day Mayhem, this is pure, raging Scandinavian black metal from the skilled hands of musicians who've lived metal's grimmest subgenre from day one.

FOR FANS OF: Thorns, Bathory, Mayhem

DEAN BROWN

PLANET OF ZEUS
Faith In Physics
HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

Greece's stoner/classic rockers make a timely return

This fifth album from Greek heavy rockers Planet Of Zeus feels like the lovechild of Clutch and Soundgarden with Rage Against The Machine-esque social commentary thrown in for good measure – fitting given the current shit-state of our global society. *Gasoline*'s blues-heavy rhythm gets the album off to a roaring start, *Your Song*'s smooth, infectious riffing is an absolute treat while the psychedelic vibes found in *King Of The Circus* makes for an immersive and equally emphatic finish to the album. Given the renewed interest in classic-leaning rock, it seems that the time couldn't be more perfect for Planet Of Zeus. Their music may be nothing new, but *Faith In Physics* is an always-entertaining listen.

FOR FANS OF: Clutch, Fu Manchu, Soundgarden

JAMES WEAVER

MORTEM
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Prime Norwegian black metal with a far-reaching pedigree

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WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe

DEATH BY FUNGI
Die In Bombay
SELF-RELEASED

Mumbai's Death By Fungi deal in discordant, savagely delivered hardcore punk. This EP flies by in a blur of seething vocals, double-time drums and choppy guitars; you'd happily spend far longer in their company.

STEPHEN HILL

DESERT
Fortune Favors The Brave
SELF-RELEASED

Powered by thrash but classily melodic, this Israeli crew's muscular hybrid will send fans of Iced Earth and Blind Guardian into an ecstatic froth. *Operation Thunderbolt* is as an instant anthem but this is all killer.

DOM LAWSON

R.A.I.D.
Imperium
ROTTWEILER

Seven tracks of old-school hardcore that sounds like it could have been made in New York in the late 80s, but is actually from the streets of Hyderabad, India. Chuggy, meaty, but fairly unremarkable.

STEPHEN HILL

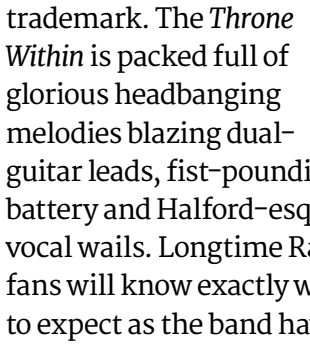
RAM
The Throne Within
METAL BLADE

Sweden's trad metal standard bearers keep the flag high

The stalwarts of Sweden's traditional heavy metal scene return with another heroic work of diehard 80s steel. Ram have skilfully executed proceedings with fanatical passion and old-school authenticity that seems to have become a quintessentially Swedish trademark. The *Throne Within* is packed full of glorious headbanging melodies blazing dual-guitar leads, fist-pounding battery and Halford-esque vocal wails. Longtime Ram fans will know exactly what to expect as the band have steadily honed their skills over their 20-year career without feeling the need to deviate or experiment with their time-honoured classic heavy metal. To hear a band producing such high-calibre material so long into their career is a rarity. Hail Ram!

FOR FANS OF. Judas Priest, Enforcer, Portrait

LIAM YATES



RENOUNCED
Beauty Is A Destructive Angel
HOLY ROAR

Forward-thinking metalcore with one foot in the old school

Renounced's first two albums looked to reinvent the modern metalcore sound the band felt was being diluted by countless also-rans. Forged in the passionate depths of UK hardcore, the five-piece hurtled to the scene's forefront and their third full-length eschews all genre limitations. Opener *Ghosts* strikes a balance between melodic fragility and cathartic ambient surprises, but that sense of security is promptly obliterated as *Self Inflicted*'s bile-soaked vocals and thunderous grooves clobber the lugs. Its hook-laden riffage evokes *The End Of Heartache*-era Killswitch Engage-on-steroids. *Saltation* rides along on a bludgeoning riff and bellowing HXC gang vocals while the anthemic stomp of *Calculated Risk* and the title track's cohesive solos are immensely satisfying. *Beauty is A Destructive Angel*'s old-school fervour has the modern-day fury to win over the masses.

FOR FANS OF: Killswitch Engage, Poison The Well, Misery Signals

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

SNOW BURIAL
Ostrava
PROSTHETIC

Ever-morphing metal grandiosity from the heart of the Windy City

Chicago's Snow Burial are the latest benefactor of Prosthetic's recent interest in increasingly inscrutable and difficult-to-define bands (i.e. Varaha, meth.). And while the trio may have deep footprints in their local scene and a discography tallying four releases already, their sound hearkens back to the late 90s and early Isis EPs, *Mosquito Control* and *The Red Sea*. *Ostrava* generally plays off a monolithic guitar tone, mid-pace tempos and vocals that bellow like baritone banshees in their catapulting of post-metal to the days when *metal* made up the majority of the equation. A horn-rimmed grandiosity may be at work, but so is the influence of thrash and hardcore via palm muting and open string pedals (*Tyranny*) as is Justin Broadrick-approved elegiac pensiveness (*Gaping Wounds*) and even flashy complications bordering on math rock on *Burn The Crown Down*.

FOR FANS OF: Isis, Neurosis, Inter Arma

CONNIE GORDON

SONATA ARCTICA
Talviyö
NUCLEAR BLAST

Finnish power metal veterans show their soft side

Power metal is often about sword-wielding beefcakes squaring up to fire-breathing dragons, but Sonata Arctica's bandleader, Tony Kakko, is arguably the bravest man in the genre for wearing his heart on his sleeve to such a clear extent. There is an emotional openness and earnest vulnerability about these 10 songs, which more hardened, cynical souls may find crosses the line into cloying sentimentality, but it deserves at least grudging admiration, not least because of the crafty catchiness of so many choruses. Although the quintet's soft, synth-glazed melodic Euro-prog-pop and baroque balladry long since nudged out their hyperactive metal chops, those old ghosts still wander, especially throughout dizzying instrumental, *Ismo's Got Good Reactors*. There's greater low-end to the power chords, but ultimately *Talviyö* brings to mind musical theatre, Meat Loaf or even Yazoo more often than Helloween.

FOR FANS OF: Nightwish, Stratovarius, Andrew Lloyd Webber

CHRIS CHANTLER

My Dying Bride take up residence at an emotional brick wall

MY DYING BRIDE
A Harvest Of Dread
PEACEVILLE

Monumental miserablists choose their fondest memories

FOR A BAND whose best songs often exceed 10 minutes, it's perhaps unsurprising that My Dying Bride have filled so many compilations in their time. Yet the first two discs in this towering five-disc reminisci-package – guitarist Andrew Craighan and vocalist Aaron Stainthorpe's personal picks of MDB songs – are unforgivably both 23 minutes shy of maximum CD time. They're all great, weighty choices, and although Aaron tops up his runtime with ponderous symphonic rearrangements from the divisive *Evinta* project, the vocals were among his finest. Disc Three is the doozy, collecting early rarities – including their heinously cult, maximally sludged-out 1991 demo – while Disc Four mops up studio demos from 1996-98 and more recent EP tracks. Don't get too excited by unfamiliar titles like *On Monolith* and *Glorious Midnight*, they were later retitled on *34.788% Complete*. Only *Hollow Cathedra* constitutes properly rare, exclusive-to-CD original material. Disc Five is a live set from 1997, comprising songs from *The Angel And The Dark River* and *Like Gods Of The Sun*; a more varied collection of love rarities would have been nice.

It would be remiss to begin a MDB career retrospective without a few lugubrious moans and grumbles. However, this venerable Yorkshire institution are probably Britain's greatest ever doom metal band (not counting Sabbath, obviously), so most of these songs are cast-iron, windswept genre classics, and it's undeniably a beautiful artefact. Wrapped in bespoke 12-inch medieval-style art, it opens into a 96-page hardback history of the band by former *Hammer* scribe Greg Moffitt, with insightful reminiscences from most significant players, copiously decorated with rare photos, flyers and artwork. The bandmate-chosen songs make for a more intimate and interesting class of 'best of', but the oral history is downright inspirational. Here's to 30 more years of bloody-minded avant-garde Northern gloom.

FOR FANS OF: Paradise Lost, Pallbearer, Opeth

CHRIS CHANTLER

Opeth scale the heights once more

OPETH
In Cauda Venenum
NUCLEAR BLAST

Swedish prog masters deliver another masterpiece

THOUGH YOU NEVER quite know what to expect from an Opeth album, such is their flawless output that exceptional quality is always guaranteed. Even 2016's *Sorceress*, arguably with fewer memorable moments than previous outings, was still a masterful, intense journey. So it comes as no surprise when the first spin of album 13 dazzles with its hedonistic bombast and wondrous array of histrionic vocals, duelling guitar and Hammond organ, Pink Floyd-esque languorous melodies, nefarious ambience and delicate acoustic picking – and that's all within the first song, *Svekets Prins* ('Dignity').

But while it's another technical achievement that pulls together decades' worth of inspiration, *In Cauda Venenum*'s real genius is in fusing Opeth's elaborate smorgasbord into a more cohesive whole. Written and recorded in their Swedish mother tongue, there's also an English version for us ignorant monolinguals to better see through its vast panoramic lens, picking out highlights from *Charlatan*'s dissonant freakout, the gorgeous strings and sumptuous lead that sees out *Minnets Yta* ('Lovelorn Crime'), right through to the mesmerising melancholy of the closing *Allting Tar Slut* ('All Things Will Pass'). Anchored by one of music's finest rhythm sections and that rich guitar tone, *Ingen Sanning Är Allas* ('Universal Truth')'s macabre peaks weave in and out of beautiful strumming and blissful dreamscapes, before the villainous cabaret of *Banemannen* ('The Garroter') sees them turned into a nightmare replete with cries of fear and Mikael Åkerfeldt's whispered threat.

While the band leader again wears his vast musical knowledge on his sleeve throughout each composition, the album also marks the best vocal performance of his career, never more so during *Kontinuerlig Drift* ('Continuum')'s breathtaking elegance. Even if you're not a fan, *In Cauda Venenum* is deserving of reverence at the very least. If you are, this is manna from heaven.

FOR FANS OF: King Crimson, Van Der Graaf Generator, Ghost

ADAM REES

TORPOR
Rhetoric Of The Image
TRUTHSEEKER MUSIC/SLUDGELORD

London's asphyxiating sludge trio finally emerge from the chasm

Torpor's genesis is as ponderous as their riffs. Formed in 2012, it's taken until now to release a second full-length with years of intensive gigging in the interim. *Rhetoric Of The Image* is the result, the band losing a member and their hardcore elements to fully commit to the all-consuming pleasures of the chasm-rending sludge riff. *Benign Circle* trades inhuman vocals and tormented riffing with eerily calm passages, descending in a dissonant pummel. The cinematic atmospheres of *Two Heads On Gold* morph into *Enigmatic Demand*'s swaggering brutality. *Rhetoric...* reeks of dissonant despair, proving heavy enough to crush the air from your lungs. Let's hope they don't leave it so long between records next time.

FOR FANS OF: Yob, Crowbar, Ghold

TOM O'BOYLE

TUNGSTEN
We Will Rise
ARISING EMPIRE

Former Hammerfall sticksman makes it a family affair

Tungsten is essentially ex- Hammerfall drummer Anders Johansson and his sons Niklas (guitar) and Kalle (bass/keyboards), and they're clearly having a great time on a collection of tracks that draw from the Nordic folk metal style, as well as European power metal. Everything bounces along well, although nothing really suggests *We Will Rise* is anything other than an entertaining diversion. *Misled* and *Wish Upon A Star* do have a neatly balanced combination of heaviness and traditional folk, with the band – completed by vocalist Mike Andersson – fully committed to the cause. The songs, however, are a little too clichéd, and what would have been a welcome spontaneity is sacrificed for precision. Hopefully time will resolve these issues.

FOR FANS OF: Finntroll, Hammerfall, Korpiklaani

MALCOLM DOME

VITRIOL
To Bathe From The Throat Of Cowardice
CENTURY MEDIA

Oregonian death metallers storm straight into the top league

With the likes of Tomb Mold, Gatecreeper and Blood Incantation setting the world alight with their respective brands of musical savagery, the new wave of death metal is in full swing. This debut full-length from Portland trio Vitriol throws down the gauntlet across 10 tracks of monstrous brutality. *The Parting Of A Neck* opens the album in blistering fashion, *The Rope Calls You Brother*'s scorching leads are jaw-dropping and, with all three tracks from 2017's debut EP making the cut, it's a welcome throwback to material that may have eluded many. The competition may be fierce, but Vitriol have made one hell of a statement.

FOR FANS OF: Tomb Mold, Blood Incantation, Misery Index

JAMES WEAVER

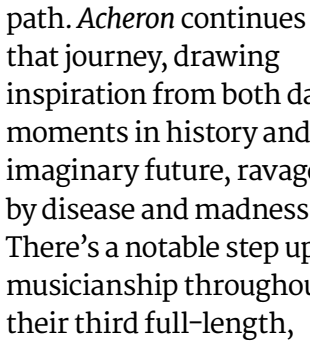
VOICE OF RUIN
Acheron
TENACITY MUSIC

Swiss groove metallers take their gear out of neutral

In 2008, Voice Of Ruin were unashamedly worshipping at the altar of acts like Lamb Of God. But as time progresses, so have the Swiss five-piece and each release sees them take a step towards their own path. *Acheron* continues that journey, drawing inspiration from both dark moments in history and an imaginary future, ravaged by disease and madness. There's a notable step up in musicianship throughout their third full-length, especially on *Rotting Crows*, which features Olympic-level fret gymnastics and a tooth-rattling performance from tub-thumper Dario Biner. The off-kilter short, sharp shock *Hypochondriac* is a standout, as is pit anthem *One Way Overdose*, while the Gregorian chant and synth-spiced *Mass Grave* helps them find their own voice.

FOR FANS OF: At The Gates, Lamb Of God, Devildriver

EDWIN MCFEE



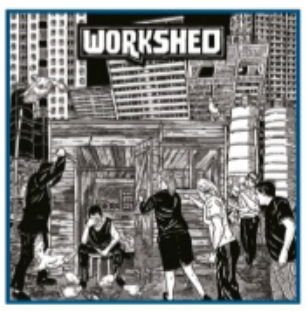
WAGE WAR
Pressure
FEARLESS

Florida's technical metalcore crew get swamped by their ambition

With their 2015 debut, *Blueprints*, and then 2017's *Deadweight*, Wage War marked themselves out as a band to watch. On album number three, the Floridians have started to play with electronics, concocting bouncy, lung-bursting metalcore that focuses on massive choruses. We already knew they could write a zinger, but between the gang chants and towering cleans on *Who I Am*, *Prison*, *Grave* and *Fury*, we're spoiled for choice. Sometimes the over-reliance on anthemia works to the band's detriment, though. *Me Against Myself*, *Hurt* and *Forget My Name* feel generic, muddying the pace of the album and blunting the rawness of tracks like *Low* and *Ghost*, which boast huge frenetic riffs in thrall to Architects. *Pressure* doesn't exactly play it safe but Wage War are at the most effective when they put their foot down on the gas.

FOR FANS OF: Polaris, Of Mice & Men, Architects

DANNII LEIVERS



WORKSHED
Workshed
RISE ABOVE

Ex-Cathedral men continue down a doomed path

Comprised of former Cathedral guitarist Adam Lehan and drummer Mark Wharton, it should come as no surprise that Workshed's debut sounds a lot like the doom legends, right down to Lehan's gruff vocal inflections being a dead ringer for Lee Dorrian. Lehan's approach to riff writing is unmistakable too, with the grubbier, nastier guitar tone making this feel like a deformed, malnourished Cathedral album that slipped through the cracks in the early 90s (albeit with a healthy flavouring of Celtic Frost too). Their sound isn't quite as inventive or well-realised, but the raw aesthetic and more minimal approach suits Lehan's bluntly confessional lyrics, detailing his struggles with depression. *Workshed* is a strong enough debut, and if the band can progress beyond the shadow of Cathedral on album number two, they could quite easily become a force to be reckoned with amidst the UK's doom scene.

FOR FANS OF: Cathedral, With The Dead, Celtic Frost

KEZ WHELAN

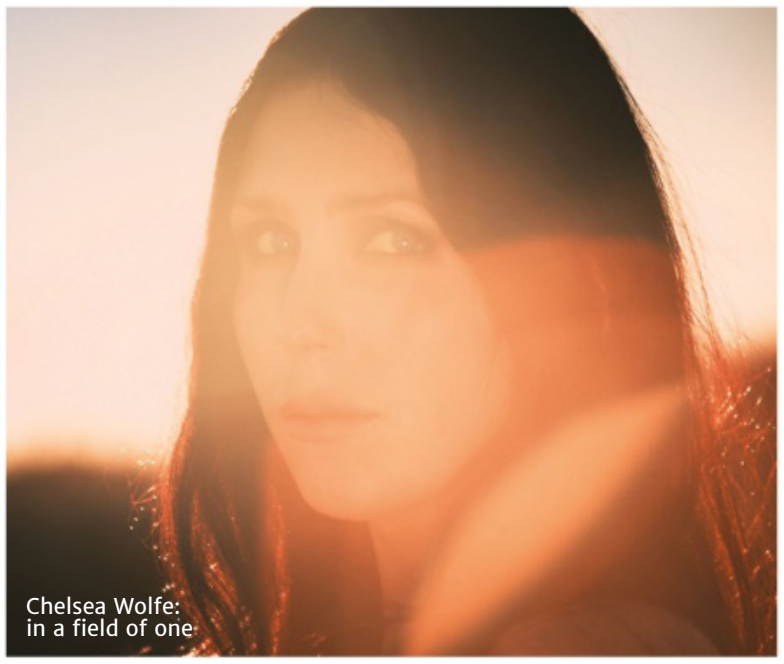
WRVTH
No Rising Sun
UNIQUE LEADER

Blackened post-metallers bid a sorrowful farewell

It's a pretty bold move to announce a new album and the end of the band in the same breath, but for Northern California's Wrvth, this move was necessary. While *No Rising Sun* may signal finality, the music is vibrant and full of metaphors for their reasons why. *Eventide* begins the album and is ushered in on radiant guitars while Thomas Vasquez's harsh vocal style brings elements of anguish to the fore; Wrvth are definitely not shying away from the horrors and trials of life here. The band use their music to weave post-rock cascades, blackened hardcore and touches of black metal into the fabric of their sound with each track speaking of turmoil and finding the path to release. *Enshrined* builds to agonising screams before *Furrows Of A Dying Tree* and its sorrowful guitars bring a sense of bittersweet closure.

FOR FANS OF: Der Weg Einer Freiheit, Hexis, Cult Of Luna

CHERYL CARTER



Chelsea Wolfe: in a field of one

CHELSEA WOLFE
Birth Of Violence
SARGENT HOUSE

California's enigmatic vocalist extraordinaire returns to her roots

CHELSEA WOLFE'S CAREER is an endless becoming, a never-ending evolution. It's ever-changing, it's full of twists and turns – and it's always unmistakably her. Her sixth studio album, though, is more of an intentional look back than it is pushing forward. On *Birth Of Violence*, the multi-faceted musician recedes from the pounding electronics of previous works such as *Abyss* and the metallic heaviness of *Hiss Spun*; seven years after the release of the acoustic collection, *Unknown Rooms*, Wolfe returns to her roots as a singer/songwriter. It's both one of the most fragile and the most powerful sides of her she's ever shown the world.

The reduced yet graceful acoustic guitar arrangements and vocals of the North California-based singer are embedded in delicate – and at times harsh – soundscapes created by her longtime companion Ben Chisholm, and sporadically accentuated by pulsating drums and tense strings. The result is a haunting sound of otherworldly, ethereal beauty that few others manage to evoke.

As usual, there is a spirituality and mysteriousness running through every plane of Chelsea Wolfe's introspective and enigmatic work. On *Birth Of Violence*, she stares into the American Darkness, as one of the songtitles suggests. This darkness is as much her own as it is one of a society in turmoil. The album is a breather from a life on the road, an elegy for the things lost along the way. *'Guess I needed something to break me, guess I needed something to shake me up'* she sings in the opening track, *The Mother Road*, making clear that this record serves a very specific, personal and important purpose for her – a meaningfulness that translates into every second of it. In the end, *Birth Of Violence* is not a reinvention, it's a rediscovery of the self and the strength that's to be found in genuine vulnerability.

FOR FANS OF: Marissa Nadler, Emma Ruth Rundle, Miserable

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OCT 7 LEEDS First Direct Arena
OCT 8 BRIGHTON Centre
OCT 10 LONDON O2 Arena
OCT 11 BIRMINGHAM Resorts World Arena
OCT 12 CARDIFF Arena

ALTER BRIDGE
SHINEDOWN,
SEVENDUST

DEC 14 NOTTINGHAM Motorpoint Arena
DEC 15 MANCHESTER Arena
DEC 17 GLASGOW SSE Hydro Arena
DEC 18 BIRMINGHAM Arena
DEC 20 CARDIFF Motorpoint Arena
DEC 21 LONDON O2 Arena

AMON AMARTH

NOV 28 BIRMINGHAM O2 Academy
NOV 29 MANCHESTER O2 Apollo
NOV 30 LONDON O2 Academy Brixton

ANNIHILATOR

OCT 26 LONDON Underworld

BABYMETAL

FEB 19 GLASGOW Barrowland
FEB 20 CARDIFF The Great Hall
FEB 22 MANCHESTER O2 Apollo
FEB 23 LONDON Eventim Apollo

BEARTOOTH

FEB 24 BRISTOL O2 Academy
FEB 25 GLASGOW SWG3 Galvanizers
FEB 26 NOTTINGHAM Rock City
FEB 28 MANCHESTER Academy
FEB 29 LONDON Roundhouse

BURY TOMORROW

DEC 13 PORTSMOUTH Pyramids Centre
DEC 14 NOTTINGHAM Rock City
DEC 15 CARDIFF Y Plas
DEC 17 NEWCASTLE Riverside
DEC 18 GLASGOW SWG3
DEC 20 MANCHESTER Academy
DEC 21 LONDON Roundhouse

CLUTCH
GRAVEYARD, KAMCHATKA

DEC 17 SOUTHAMPTON O2 Guildhall
DEC 18 LONDON Roundhouse
DEC 19 LEEDS O2 Academy
DEC 20 NOTTINGHAM Rock City

CONJURER
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ARMED FOR APOCALYPSE

OCT 24 NOTTINGHAM Beta
OCT 25 MANCHESTER Star & Garter
OCT 26 GLASGOW Attic
OCT 27 LEEDS Key Club
OCT 28 BRISTOL Crofters Rights
OCT 29 LONDON Boston Music Rooms
OCT 30 BIRMINGHAM Flapper

CULT OF LUNA
BRUTUS, AA WILLIAMS

NOV 28 LEEDS University Stylus
NOV 29 LONDON Electric Ballroom

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NOV 2 LEEDS University Union

DELAIN

FEB 6 BIRMINGHAM O2 Institute
FEB 7 MANCHESTER O2 Ritz
FEB 8 BRISTOL Anson Rooms
FEB 9 LONDON Electric Ballroom

DEVIN TOWNSEND
HAKEN

DEC 5 CARDIFF Great Hall
DEC 6 DUBLIN The Academy
DEC 7 BELFAST Limelight
DEC 9 GLASGOW SWG3 Galvanizers
DEC 10 MANCHESTER Albert Hall
DEC 12 LONDON The Roundhouse
DEC 13 NOTTINGHAM Rock City

GHOST
ALL THEM WITCHES, TRIBULATION

NOV 16 NOTTINGHAM Motorpoint Arena

PRESS/EIDER ITURRIAGA-IZARBE

Danko: fired up for his tour with Volbeat and Baroness

ROAD TRIPPIN'

DANKO JONES

The rock'n'roll hero is part of a riff-heavy bill alongside Volbeat and Baroness

How have you been doing lately, Danko?
Danko Jones (vocals, guitar): "Mercury is in retrograde! There was a spate recently where five things were fucking up three days in a row and I questioned what the fuck was going on. Shit was fucking up for me so badly, I said it out loud on social media and somebody said Mercury was in retrograde and I realised it was actually a thing. Part of me believes in it and part of me doesn't but when it's that often, it's hard to deny."

What can we find you up to on days off on tour?
"When I see that they're coming up, I make sure to line up little projects and that's the reason I do two podcasts. I busy myself recording podcasts and finishing up articles, I wrote five articles in the last two days off. It's partly to pass days off and time in the hotel, it's a 'hurry up and wait' kind of industry so I got sick and tired of waiting."

What is the Danko Jones tour bus really like?
"We're so respectful of each other's space at this point, it's actually the only way a band can last as long as we have. You eventually realise if you're going to make things work, you have to figure out how to deal with each other in close-quarters like that because it's really cramped. As a singer, I'm usually the first to bed as it's the only way my voice can snap back the next day, especially on longer tours. For the Volbeat tour, we're the opening band so the pressure's off and it won't be like that this time, plus the Volbeat guys are cool and there's mutual respect all round, also with Baroness as we've played shows with them before and they're really nice."

What can fans expect from your opening set with Volbeat this year?
"We're doing a lot of songs off the new album, *A Rock Supreme*, more so than any past albums because we're getting good feedback. We turned a corner three albums ago with *Fire Music* in 2015, I wasn't nervous as it was about to be released as I was with albums before that, so that's a good indication I want people to hear it. Ninety-six percent of the feedback we've had is positive; we're happy people like it and we agree."

ROAD TRIPPIN' CONJURER

One of the UK's most exciting young bands is doing a homeland headline tour next month

Brady, how insane is life on the road with Conjurer?
Brady Deeprose (vocals, guitar): "I can't tell you how far removed from the rock'n'roll lifestyle this entire band is. We'll listen to Carly Rae Jepsen on the way to shows and go home afterwards because we all live with our mums. On one of our days off in the States, I was so ill that I sat in a comfortable hotel room all day reading *Eragon*. I don't need a rock'n'roll life to enjoy being in a band with my mates."

What's your least favourite part of touring life?
"Ninety-five percent of the time we're given the option to do soundchecks, we won't do them because you have to shout before you've done your proper vocal warm-ups, plus that's the time you need to find some food. If you can't play without a soundcheck, you're either a band with very weird instrumentation or you've not played enough crap shows. When you've played as many toilet venues as we have, you learn to play without monitors, a PA or even a stage. When it all works, it's just a bonus, it's not something to be expected."

You're taking Armed For Apocalypse on tour with you in October. How did that happen?
"They were one of our biggest influences when we started Conjurer, to the point we've unintentionally but fully ripped them off in some of our songs. They took a few years off, which stalled their progress in the UK, we made friends with them while playing shows with them in the US and now we're taking them out on our run this year. It's so cool to be able to help out a band that have done so much for me and Conjurer."

Tell us about the debate you took part in at ArcTanGent…
"I love talking, that's my main role within this band and I was looking forward to talking over everyone for 45 minutes. It was with Tom Begley from Bossk, who is one of the legends of the UK post-metal scene, and Christian Bonnesen from LLNN, who are the most hilarious guys. I don't think any of us had done anything like that so it's a testament to how insane ArcTanGent is. Tom officially requested from ArcTanGent that we have mimosas before we talked."

NOV 17 CARDIFF Motorpoint Arena
NOV 18 GLASGOW SSE Hydro
NOV 20 DUBLIN 3Arena
NOV 22 LONDON SSE Arena Wembley
NOV 23 LEEDS First Direct Arena

HALESTORM
IN THIS MOMENT, NEW YEARS DAY
NOV 24 GLASGOW Hydro
NOV 25 NOTTINGHAM Motorpoint Arena
NOV 27 CARDIFF Motorpoint Arena
NOV 28 LONDON Alexandra Palace

HEILUNG
NOV 10 LONDON Roundhouse

KATAKLYSM
WHITECHAPEL, FLESHGOD APOCALYPSE, DYSCARNATE
DEC 5 LONDON Electric Ballroom

KILLSWITCH ENGAGE
OCT 14 NORWICH UEA
OCT 15 BRISTOL O2 Academy
OCT 17 GLASGOW Barrowland
OCT 18 MANCHESTER Academy
OCT 19 BIRMINGHAM O2 Academy
OCT 20 LONDON Brixton Academy

LACUNA COIL
NOV 12 MANCHESTER O2 Ritz
NOV 13 GLASGOW Garage
NOV 14 DUBLIN Academy
NOV 15 BRISTOL SWX
NOV 16 LONDON O2 Kentish Town Forum
NOV 17 NOTTINGHAM Rock City

MACHINE HEAD
NOV 2 LONDON O2 Brixton Academy
NOV 4 MANCHESTER Victoria Warehouse
NOV 5 GLASGOW O2 Academy
NOV 7 BELFAST Telegraph Building
NOV 8 DUBLIN Olympia Theatre

NILE
SEP 24 MANCHESTER Club Academy
SEP 25 GLASGOW Slay
SEP 26 LONDON Dome

OPETH
OCT 27 NORWICH UEA
OCT 29 LONDON Palladium
OCT 31 GLASGOW SWG Galvanizers
NOV 1 DUBLIN Olympia Theatre
NOV 3 BRISTOL O2 Academy

OZZY OSBOURNE
JUDAS PRIEST
JAN 31 NOTTINGHAM Motorpoint Arena
FEB 2 DUBLIN 3Arena
FEB 5 MANCHESTER Arena
FEB 7 NEWCASTLE Utilita Arena
FEB 10 LONDON O2 Arena
FEB 12 GLASGOW SSE Hydro
FEB 14 BIRMINGHAM Resorts World Arena

RAMMSTEIN
JUN 17 BELFAST Boucher Playing Fields
JUN 20 COVENTRY Ricoh Arena

ROTTING CHRIST
OCT 29 LONDON Islington Assembly Hall

SABATON
APOCALYPTICA, AMARANTHE
FEB 8 LONDON SSE Arena Wembley

SACRED REICH
NOV 27 LONDON Underworld
NOV 29 NEWCASTLE University
NOV 30 GLASGOW Classic Grand
DEC 1 BELFAST Limelight
DEC 3 DUBLIN Voodoo Lounge
DEC 4 WOLVERHAMPTON Steel Mill

SAXON
OCT 18 GLASGOW Braehead Arena
OCT 19 LONDON Eventim Apollo
OCT 20 MANCHESTER O2 Apollo

SKID ROW
NOV 29 SCOTLAND Winterstorm Festival
NOV 30 WAKEFIELD Warehouse
DEC 1 NOTTINGHAM Rock City
DEC 3 SOUTHAMPTON Engine Rooms
DEC 4 CARDIFF Tramshed
DEC 6 TRECCO BAY Planet Rock Stock
DEC 7 SHEFFIELD Winter Rocks
DEC 8 BIRMINGHAM The Mill

SLEEP TOKEN
NOV 3 LONDON Underworld
NOV 4 MANCHESTER Academy 3

SLIPKNOT
BEHEMOTH
JAN 14 DUBLIN 3Arena
JAN 16 MANCHESTER Arena
JAN 17 NEWCASTLE Utilita Arena
JAN 18 GLASGOW The SSE Hydro
JAN 20 SHEFFIELD FlyDSA Arena
JAN 21 NOTTINGHAM Motorpoint Arena
JAN 22 CARDIFF Motorpoint Arena
JAN 24 BIRMINGHAM Arena
JAN 25 LONDON O2 Arena

STATIC-X
SOIL, WEDNESDAY 13, DOPE
SEP 24 BRISTOL SWX
SEP 25 CARDIFF Tramshed
SEP 26 LONDON Electric Ballroom
SEP 27 NOTTINGHAM Rock City
SEP 28 LEEDS Stylus
SEP 29 SOUTHAMPTON Engine Rooms
OCT 01 NEWCASTLE Northumbria Institute
OCT 02 GLASGOW Garage
OCT 03 MANCHESTER The Ritz
OCT 04 BIRMINGHAM O2 Institute

VOLBEAT
BARONESS, DANKO JONES
SEP 23 NEWCASTLE O2 Academy
SEP 24 GLASGOW O2 Academy
SEP 26 LONDON O2 Academy Brixton
SEP 28 BRISTOL O2 Academy
SEP 30 BIRMINGHAM O2 Academy
OCT 1 MANCHESTER O2 Apollo
OCT 3 BELFAST Ulster Hall
OCT 4 DUBLIN Olympia Theatre

PRESS

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LIVE REVIEWS

BLOODSTOCK 2019

CATTON HALL, DERBY

Parkway Drive and Sabaton bring fire and thunder to Derby

THURSDAY/FRIDAY

Here we go again. Four days of heavy fucking metal. With intermittent thunderstorms. But the elements be damned, Bloodstock Open Air is open for business. **ROTTING CHRIST** storm the Sophie Lancaster tent like the finely honed headline act they've become. Imperious and devastating, they're a joy to watch. Resurrected thrashers **XENTRIX** make their main, Ronnie James Dio stage debut count on the Friday. Armed with a blend of old and new, the Brits are a band reborn, and if *No Compromise* doesn't make you bang your head, you have no head. **DEATH ANGEL** are still thrash metal's irrepressible upstarts. From *Voracious Souls* to *Humanicide*, their timeless, fiery sound is perfect for the sunshine. He might look like a personal trainer, but **METAL CHURCH**'s Mike Howe has one of those classic voices that induces shivers. An epic and haunting *Beyond The Black* is a none-more-metal peak.

CONTROL THE STORM rise to the challenge of waking up the Sophie tent, letting loose some triumphant and bombastic power metal stylings, complete with pyro. It feels appropriate that **BONGCAULDRON** aren't long for this earth. Announcing their final show, the band's fuzz-drenched doom offers an intense experience, equal parts dour and droll. There's a fairly small crowd for **KARYBDIS** but the London-based tech-death metallers go about their brutal business with aplomb, and some wide grins, regardless. **DAMNATION'S HAMMER** have tons of nasty, frosted riffs that groove and grind with malevolent intent. **SOULFLY** are on better form than we've seen them for some time on the main stage. New material from *Ritual* sounds particularly strong, full of the kind of speed and guts that made Max Cavalera a name all those years ago, and he seems fitter and more focused performing it.

COUNTLESS SKIES sound absolutely huge on the Sophie stage. Their meld of anthemic power metal and atmospheric black metal is beautifully unique, and they make a lot of new friends today. A riot follows, and it's all **RAGING SPEEDHORN**'s fault. The Corby sextet still sound like the aural equivalent of a football hooligan firm pissed off its head and listening to Crowbar. Many necks and limbs will be sore tomorrow.

As Bloodstock's house band, Evil Scarecrow have a lot to crow about

CHILDREN OF BODOM's set is sadly carried away by the wind, but the band still look and sound more vital than they have in years, particularly when leaning on the anthemic tunes of latest record *Hexed* with a few golden oldies thrown in for good measure. Dropped between Bodom and Powerwolf isn't the usual environment for **TESSERACT** and the crowd seems more intrigued than excited at first, but material from last year's *Sonder* is so instantaneous that, by the end, the djent pioneers leave to a heroes' reception. To say that **POWERWOLF** grab their second BOA opportunity with both bloodstained hands would be a huge understatement. From *Fire And Forgive* onwards, the Germans are unstoppable. If they had been headlining, no one would have batted an ashen eyelid. As a result, despite a show that frequently feels like an actual war kicking off, **SABATON** only narrowly avoid being an awkward anti-climax. The Swedes are adored here and every pompous refrain is bellowed to the sky, but with little in the way of dynamics, this feels more like a hard-fought battle than an unequivocal victory. **GRAND MAGUS** take us into the night with a textbook demonstration of old-school vitality. The likes of *Steel Versus Steel* and *Kingslayer* hit the nail on the head with Thor-like force. Hails!

THE SET

SABATON
Ghost Division
Great War
Resist And Bite
Fields Of Verdun
Winged Hussars
82nd All The Way
The Price Of A Mile
Bismarck
The Red Baron
The Lion From The North
Carolus Rex
Night Witches
The Lost Battalion
Shiroyama
The Last Stand

ENCORE
Primo Victoria
Swedish Pagans
To Hell And Back

SATURDAY

KRYSTHLA's thuggish grooves are the perfect wake-up call, songs like *Zero Sum Game* getting aching necks snapping in sync. Over on the Sophie stage, **THE PARALLAX METHOD**'s progressively minded instrumental metal is impressively complex, but quite a lot for the hungover hordes to comprehend at this early hour. **LOTUS EATER** are as lairy as the weekend gets, and the Glaswegians' tech-death/metalcore mash-up is horrible. **CANCER BATS** encounter wind, rain, poor sound and a slightly sceptical main stage crowd, but one of hardcore's most reliably consistent and fun bands just do their thing, culminating in a cover of Sabbath's *War Pigs* to win the day. The wind turns **SWALLOW THE SUN**'s set into a perverse, psychedelic remix. The beauty of the Finns' music shines through regardless, as the crowd sways gently in hungover unison. There is no standing still during **EVIL SCARECROW**'s now-obligatory conquering of the main stage. These beloved berks are a formidable unit underneath the shit costumes and *Hurricanado* really does leave us in a spin. There's colour, bizarre stage garb, masks, showmanship and, for a throwback, scantily clad ladies to keep your attention during **RED METHOD**'s set on the Sophie stage. Luckily they have enough Pantera-meets-Slipknot groove to musically back up their visual aesthetic. While most thrash bands are rooted in the scene's rapid-fire early days, Germany's **DUST BOLT** are drawn to the late 80s when the tempo was notched down to find new space within the riffs. This afternoon, they're a lean, headbanging machine, but it's still the few speedier tracks that set the pits off. **HELHEIM**'s Viking metal is of the panoramic, open-ended variety, nudged ever further into wide-open territories by rich bass grooves and solemn chants that turn into a full-on raid when a Taake's Hoest joins them towards the end.

CJ McMahon is on hilariously fine form, calling out the British weather, Parkway Drive and impersonating Michael Jackson, which leads to a truly

Sabaton emerge victorious from the frontlines of battle

SABATON FEEL LIKE AN ACTUAL WAR KICKING OFF

Cancer Bats' Liam Cormier, repping for Cavalera Jnr

Tesseract make new friends with ease

JAMES SHARROCK

Thy Art Is Murder's CJ McMahon picks a fight with the elements

The summer is dying fast and the weather means Dani Filth is a day late to the party

great **THY ART IS MURDER** set. New material from *Human Target* sounds especially exciting. **THE WILDHEARTS** aren't here to fuck around. Instead, they serve up 45 minutes of relentless rock'n'roll fury while exhibiting more attitude than the rest of the bill put together. After a three-hour break due to the weather conditions, **ANTHRAX** finally make it onstage an hour late to a rapturous reception. They're as solid as ever, and play some of the greatest songs in thrash history, but the lack of any newer material seems to have relegated them to a nostalgia act today.

Arguably the most anticipated/controversial headliner in Bloodstock history close Saturday with everything to prove and gain. The elements and the gap in proceedings don't help, neither does the oddly quiet sound coming from the stage, but **PARKWAY DRIVE** aren't the sort of band that were ever going to lay down and accept defeat, and the Australian metalcore heavyweights pull out all the stops to win over any doubters in the field. We get pyro, flaming torches, a string quartet, a clutch of older metalcore favourites, crushers from 2015's *Ire* and darker, more subtle material from last year's *Reverence*. By the time *Bottom Feeder* closes us out, Parkway Drive can walk away knowing they beat adversity to prove their worth as a headliner.

Just as Watain raised the black metal flag high over Bloodstock last year, so Bergen's black metal firebrands **TAAKE** take it upon themselves to put everything else this weekend into perspective. Their own Sophie headline set is a full-on, sense-battering assault. Hoest is an incendiary, charismatic focus point leading the band through priapic, raging, punk-wracked riffs and epic anthems, and embodying an irrepressible, primal power that workd it way through the huge tent. Their set even ends the night with a group of women on shoulders, down the front, pointing topless in his direction.

THE SET

PARKWAY DRIVE
Wishing Wells
Prey
Vice Grip
Karma
Cemetery Bloom
The Void
Idols And Anchors
Dedicated
Absolute Power
Writings On The Wall
Shadow Boxing
Wild Eyes

ENCORE
Crushed
Bottom Feeder

SUNDAY

Putting on an impassioned main stage performance with an almost absurd amount of low-end, **ALL HAIL THE YETI** blast away Sunday's cobwebs with metalcore snarlers *Burn The Witch* and *Mister Murder*. **ABORTED** can always be relied upon to smash the place up. Frontman Svencho is the best in the death metal business and his band are terrifyingly tight, scorning a torrential downpour with vicious jolts of blasting heat. When **ROSS THE BOSS** emerges with his band to pummel through some Manowar classics, the reaction borders on hysterical. When K.K. Downing joins him for a handful of Judas Priest tunes, we may have reached Peak Metal and Bloodstock loses its shit. **SOILWORK** bring some classic melodeath bangers to the field. We could use a little more excitement from them visually, but musically they rule. Hearing the guitar tone of **HYPOCRISY**'s Peter Tägtgren coming over the speakers is a thing of beauty, and the Swedes give us a neck-bothering set of classic death metal anthems that everyone laps up.

You can tell from the love in the Sophie tent that prog-doom savants **BOSS KELOID** have really connected. Today they are dazzling, exhilarating and batshit mad in equal measure. Alex Hurst is one hell of a frontman. What a band. **CRESCENT** bring epic death metal majesty direct from Egypt, and the balance they strike between grandeur and grit is masterful. Infernal mission accomplished. The tent feels far too small to contain the epic, sweeping melodic death metal of **BLOODRED HOURGLASS**. Expect them to be on main stage in a few years. **DAMIM**'s oddball death metal extremity succeeds in its aim of cutting through the alcohol and giving people's brains a slap. This is ugly music for ugly times, but the Brits deliver it with the skill of champions.

Parkway Drive do all they can to lay waste to the field *and* dry out the punters

PARKWAY DRIVE WERE NEVER GOING TO ACCEPT DEFEAT

JAMES SHARROCK

Batushka bring the ritual to Bloodstock

DEE SNIDER's massive personality is an instant crowd-winner on the main stage. With utter *tunes* like *We're Not Gonna Take It* and *I Wanna Rock*, he proves a heavy metal champion through and through, and hasn't forgotten how to put a headline quality performance in either. With absurdly talented vocalist Todd la Torre, **QUEENSRŸCHE** are transformed from the confused mess of a decade ago. Today they deliver classic after classic, from an immaculate *Walk In The Shadows* to a towering *Eyes Of A Stranger*. It's brilliant to have them back.

After a 24-hour delay, **CRADLE OF FILTH** waste no time in scorching us with pyro and assailing our whistling ears. A grimly twinkling *Saffron's Curse* and an imperious *Her Ghost In The Fog* seal the belated deal. Once again, Bloodstock is blasted with Manowar songs, this time courtesy of (if you don't look too closely) all-girl tribute act **WOMENOWAR**. As daft as this all is, it's impossible to ignore how much people adore these songs. Hail and kill, indeed. Practise makes perfect for **BATUSHKA**. Correcting what went wrong at Download, the band are a captivating force to behold as they unleash searing black metal with a ritualistic twist.

You can't argue with 50 years of active service or a set full of timeless gems. **SCORPIONS** are brilliant tonight, with everything from *Blackout* and *The Zoo* to *Winds Of Change* and *Rock You Like A Hurricane* proclaiming the prowess of masters. Legendary fun, basically. In times gone by, Bloodstock would be the only game in town for folk metal acts so far as festivals were concerned. **ELUVEITE**'s set shows the genre still has a home at the festival, the band pulling an enormous crowd to close out the weekend on some absurdly energetic heaviness, leaving everyone on a high, if not exactly dry.

STEPHEN HILL/RICH HOBSON/DOM LAWSON/ JONATHAN SELZER

WACKEN OPEN AIR 2019

Saxon, Slayer and Sabaton rule over metal's biggest festival

THURSDAY

Following the world's longest beer pipeline to the world's biggest metal festival, on our arrival at Wacken's Holy Land for this 30th event, **TESTAMENT**'s Chuck Billy is announcing that it's time to bang our heads. Necks will be under severe stress until Sunday morning, and we will be exhorted to raise our hands and make some noise about 200 times a day, but there is an atmosphere here that makes a metalhead feel at home. Next up, hair rotates, fists are clenched and choruses are belted out when Swedes invade the Bullhead Circus Tent, affording us a chance to compare two fine death metal exports. **GRAVE** maintain a gritty, blue-collar demeanour, connecting on a visceral street level, while **UNLEASHED** bring an epic sweep, Johnny Hedlund's Viking rabble-rousing raising the bar for audience engagement. The literal fire of black metal stalwarts **DARK FUNERAL** raises the Satanic heat, their show more memorable than their songs.

HAMMERFALL celebrate their "true German heavy metal from Sweden" on the co-main stage. The quintet offer an impressive arsenal of hits such as *Hammer High*, and the mighty *Any Means Necessary* and, towards the end, a folk trio imaginatively called Hammerfolk leavens the mood with the *Game Of Thrones* theme. **AIRBOURNE**'s four-to-the-floor riffing and chanting turns out to be exactly what Wacken needs in between two power metal giants. **SABATON** follow by playing the two main stages at the same time with the help of former members Rikard Sundén, Daniel Mÿhr, Daniel Mullback and Thobbe Englund. The endeavour is a bit too much, though, since the Swedes are at their best when they fire out their war anthems more efficiently. Tom G Warrior has all bases covered, though, leading a new line-up through the blunt, ragged chaos of his wildly influential teenage death/black/doom pioneers **HELLHAMMER**, and their preposterously heavy, especially pant-shitting endpoint, *Triumph Of Death*, closing day one on a truly terminal note.

FRIDAY

GLORYHAMMER only make sense at Wacken, where inflatable swords and unicorns are waggled by acolytes enthralled by their cosplay comedy

Opeth: no Poison chalice for Mikael and co

bombast. They've only just declared themselves *Masters Of The Galaxy* when they have to leave the stage with the announcement of an oncoming storm. Wacken empties and closes astonishingly quickly, but all we get is distant thunder and drizzle. **LIFE OF AGONY** restart proceedings with a cry of "Fuck the rain!" and Mina Caputo works hard to channel the sunshine on a debut-heavy set that pulls the heartstrings of more sensitive punters.

Even more heartbroken are Faroese doomsters **HAMFERÐ**, who pack out the History Tent with a tangible buzz. Soaring with epic grace and crushing with immense weight, many of us end up crumpled to the floor, covered in fag-ash and spilt beer. **VENOM INC** start off wobbly, and Mantas looks furious; this may be why they soon pick up so powerfully, cranking out inspirational all-time classics with volume, aggression and attitude. The same qualities apply to NYC's **PRONG**. They're a very different sort of power trio, but their neck-snapping force is equally dangerous. **WITHIN TEMPTATION** and the constantly grinning Sharon den Adel spread positive energy on the Harder Stage, followed by Jon Schaffer and Hansi Kürsch's resurrected power metal outfit **DEMONS & WIZARDS**, who get a rapturous reception to bridge the 10 years of absence.

THY ART IS MURDER blend some human and sonic goulash. It's just one swell of demolition with persistent breakdowns and circle pits that would have been even more substantial if **SLAYER** weren't performing at the same time. Tom Araya can't move much, but his voice sounds incredible, and he looks 20 years younger – it's crazy to think this band is nearly over. Inverted crosses are formed by shooting flames as the LA thrash kings splash their blood-red lightshow over 80,000 gleeful metalheads, accompanying a near-perfect setlist. The band soak up their heroes' reception, Tom savouring every moment before withdrawing with a final "Auf wiedersehen".

"At least we don't have to follow Poison," quips frontman Mikael Åkerfeldt as **OPETH** start their magisterial post-midnight set with a spring in their step, digging back to *Blackwater Park* to save the battle-vested metal warriors from being overwhelmed by mellow prog on a Wacken main stage.

SATURDAY

KVELERTAK's newbie frontman Ivar Nikolaisen takes the Louder stage like a boss. Their black'n'roll may not sound as massive as usual, if only because sound snatches of **BATTLE BEAST** – who could have been created in a lab by a mad (German) scientist trying to devise the ultimate Wacken band – on the Faster Stage invade, but the Norwegians put on an elegant finish as half of the band goes crowdsurfing. **PRIMORDIAL** strike like a battery-acid enema after Battle Beast's candy-coated jollity, rubbing our faces in history's iniquities even while frontman Alan Averill pulls all the rabble-rousing tricks with the best of them.

PROPHETS OF RAGE bring variation from all the more traditional heavy metal, but the crowed totally lose it to classics like *Know Your Enemy, Sleep Now In The Fire* and the inevitable *Killing In The Name*. **POWERWOLF** are inexplicably popular here, seemingly all 80,000 attendees entranced by the spectacle of sub-Misfits imagery wrapped around basic, cheesy goth-pop power metal. **SAXON** have been headlining festivals since before most of the audience were born, which explains Biff Byford's relaxed self-assurance, hitting high notes with masterly nonchalance. The Eagle lighting rig is breathtaking, each of the 19 songs is a killer, and the Lemmy footage brings a tear to the eye. After 11 Wackens, Saxon remain a masterclass in how to close a festival on a high note.

CHRIS CHANTLER/LOTHAR GERBER

Kvelertak wage war against the (Battle) Beast

Hellhammer close day one by force

Saxon could do this with their eyes closed by now

DEREK BREMNER

ARCTANGENT 2019

FERNHILL FARM, BRISTOL

Meshuggah, Cult Of Luna and Coheed And Cambria bring technical ecstasy to Bristol

THURSDAY

NOW IN ITS seventh year, ArcTanGent is one of the UK's fastest-growing festivals, having quadrupled its attendance since the inaugural event in 2013. With a number of big-hitters on this year's bill, the independent experimental post-, math- and alt-rock festival is in the best shape it's ever been.

Marijuana smoke hangs thick like a fog as **BOSSK** drop a new song. It sounds great but it's old favourites such as *Atom Smasher* and *Heliopause* that really get the crowd going. **MØL** are reliably excellent, reiterating why their strain of blackgaze is currently leading the pack, despite being a relatively new band. An appearance from Conjurer screamer Brady on *Bruma* cements their status. **ZEAL & ARDOR** are never short of brilliant, even if today's performance is slightly marred by minor technical difficulties. The tent is overflowing, however, and their continued ascent seems assured. **RAKETKANON** are arguably the most unique band on an extraordinarily diverse and eclectic bill. Their synth-led hardcore is utterly captivating and unique, making it comfortably one of the best sets of the weekend. A packed PX3 tent witnesses one of the most emotionally stirring performances of **PIJN**'s career. The Manchester collective are bolstered with three string players, which elevates their cathartic brand of post-rock to monolithic levels of intensity. **DAUGHTERS**' unique sense of chaos has to be seen to be believed. Vocalist Alexis Marshall self-flagellates with his mic whilst the band flail wildly to their discordant noise rock. The effect is utterly sublime.

COHEED AND CAMBRIA were always an intriguing booking to close Thursday and there seems to be a perceptible split in ATG's crowd between über-fans and those apathetic towards the emo-prog raconteurs. Consequently, they draw an enthusiastic if somewhat scattered audience for a headliner but those who are in attendance sing back the refrains to *A Favor House Atlantic* and *Welcome Home* as if their lives depended on it.

Zeal & Ardor dare you to look away, boy

FRIDAY

Friday dawns with an apocalyptic downpour of rain, but with all the stages covered, it does little to dampen the spirits or enthusiasm of ATG's patrons. **BIRDS IN ROW** certainly don't appear fazed by the weather, with their angular, post-hardcore Fugazi-meets-At the Drive In din proving searing and sincere. **SLEEP TOKEN** have been hyped relentlessly, which has led to a stark division between worshippers and dissenters. Material from their upcoming debut full-length, *Sundowning*, follows the familiar quiet-LOUD-LOUDER template, a worrying sign that they may be a one-trick pony. Nottingham's **PALM READER** are frighteningly ferocious whilst retaining an astonishing level of technical complexity. This is one of the most underrated bands of the modern era; don't sleep on them. **BLACK PEAKS FEAT. JAMIE LENMAN** was always going to be a special set, with the ex-Reuben frontman taking over vocal duties for one show only whilst regular frontman Will Gardner recovers from health issues. Seeing Black Peaks in a slightly different context just reminds you what an astonishing band the Brighton lads have become and a couple of Reuben songs are the icing on the cake of a one-of-a-kind set. Post-metal trio **RUSSIAN CIRCLES** lean heavily on recent album, *Blood Year*. Despite unfamiliarity, it's surprising how well new songs such as *Arluck* and *Quartered* flow alongside the likes of old favourites *Harper Lewis* and *309*.

SATURDAY

LLNN's apocalyptic presence might have been better suited to Friday's metrological misery. They're obscenely loud, but it's the unnerving vocals and harmonies that leave the most unsettling yet hypnotic mark. **AZUSA** struggle valiantly through some crippling early sound issues to show that the sum of their parts could amount to something truly special. Despite the metallic pedigree around her, it's enigmatic singer Eleni Zafiriadou who emerges as the collective's ace. **AND SO I WATCH YOU FROM AFAR** play a secret set to a headline-sized crowd at 5:45pm. With the band playing their debut self-titled album in full, the crowd ecstatically sing back complex guitar lines en masse with as much aplomb as a Download crowd would sing a Rob Zombie chorus. Simply magical.

CULT OF LUNA explode with all the heat and intensity of a nuclear bomb in a transcendent display of dynamic virtuosity. New tracks *The Silent Man* and *Nightwalker* bode well for their new album, *A Dawn To Fear*, but it's the more familiar likes of *Finland* and *Ghost Trail* that prove positively cataclysmic. When Sammy Unwin isn't climbing the tent poles, **EMPLOYED TO SERVE**'s riff-heavy ferocity makes a late attempt to steal the weekend's spoils. Even though they've become such a dependable live force there's something positively caustic about their set.

Which just leaves Swedish tech-juggernauts **MESHUGGAH** to assault our senses with their jaw-dropping display of pulverising riffs, polyrhythmic beats and dazzling lights. Hardly the most visually dynamic of bands, Meshuggah hypnotise the gathered throng into one bio-mechanical throbbing mass, moving to the beat of their complex counter-rhythmical drum. *Clockworks* astounds, *Bleed* decimates and *Future Breed Machine* discourages all bands in the audience from even attempting to reach the Swede's dizzying heights. An astonishing finale to one of 2019's best weekend of music in the UK.

REMFRY DEDMAN/ADAM REES

DUNCAN EVERSON

Employed To Serve are having a wail of a time

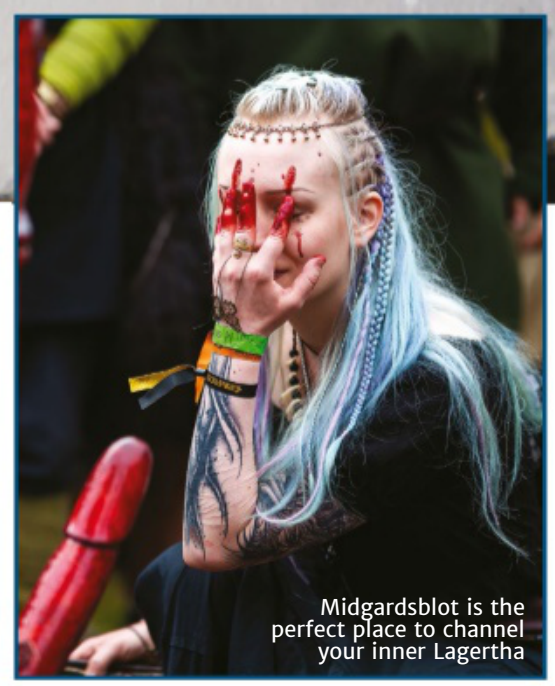
Seeing Meshuggah live should be one of your life goals

Cult Of Luna go nuclear at ArcTanGent

Gaahl is still a force to be reckoned with in the daylight

MIDGARDSBLOT FESTIVAL

Heilung, Enslaved and more raise the ancient spirits of community



Midgardsblot is the perfect place to channel your inner Lagertha

THURSDAY

Within a forest, bordered by the Oslo fjord and Viking burial mounds, Midgardsblot Festival is celebrating its fifth year. A small event of about 3,500, it's essentially a hybrid between a metal festival and a Viking re-enactment ceremony – with the clientele mainly a mix of leather-clad extreme metallers and pelt-wearing Vikings guzzling mead from horns. The festival begins with the opening Blot ritual. Led by the almost comically contrary small and tall dishevelled Viking duo Benny and Gustave – the nucleus of pagan folk troubadours Folket Bortafor Nordavinden – this ceremony sees them chanting and pounding drums within the centre of the audience, inviting everyone to take part: to come within the circle, call to your Norse God of choice and to smear your face with the unidentified blood – yes, *real* blood – on the sacramental altar. Throughout the ritual, one thing is made clear: while such a spectacle could intimidate, Benny and Gustave emphasise how it doesn't matter what you believe, or even if you do: you are welcomed to Midgardsblot with love, into a festival that is about community, acceptance and, perhaps most importantly, rebirth.

GAAHLS WYRD aren't exactly a daytime band, but with the main stage overlooking a reconstructed Great Hall, and with the ever-imposing Gaahl slinking around and staring down the audience, they're still a powerful experience. New songs such as *Ghosts Invited* add fresh dynamism to the Gorgoroth and Trelldom classics, as the closely knit band become one exhilarating force of will. Resplendent in a black and red cape, Attila Csihar is clearly having the time of his former life with his resurrected original band, **TORMENTOR**. Drawing maximum energy from the transition point between punk and black metal their pile-driving, mace-encased riffs batter the main arena, led by Attila's distinctive, otherworldly croak. Somewhat more serene, **IVAR BJØRNSON & EINAR SELVIK**'s collaborative project has a special resonance here, their Skuggsjá venture being the cornerstone on which Midgardsblot was founded. Far-sighted and charged with a deeply poignant wanderlust, the likes of *WulthuR* bind ancient folk to heart-swelling, progressive pilgrimages to a crowd lost in rapt, misty-eyed awe.

FRIDAY

Tønsberg's **SYNTHETIC GENTLEMEN** are an incongruous start to day two, even if their unashamedly cheese-sprinkled hard rock would be perfect, beer-raising fodder for any regular

festival. **NAN MADOL**'s jagged riffs and syncopated rhythms could make them Norway's answer to Tool, with vocalist Kolbjørn Enge's gruff yet melodic vocals helping them hit the right balance between prog heaviness and expansive melody. While fully on-brand, **VOLUSPÁ**'s wistful folk rock is a little too polite to make any lasting impact, but in the Great Hall China's **ZURIAAKE** offer a fully transporting experience instead. Bedecked in black conical dulì hats, robes and feathers like a mystic clan, their fusion of black metal fury with elegiac, tradition-infused grace to enthralling effect. **VREID**'s often stoic, mid-paced black metal gets an injection of jaunty, boisterous energy today that animates the main arena crowd in kind, before **GÅTE**'s hybrid of progressive metal/Norwegian folk complete with violin is brought to glorious life by their vocalist Gunnhild Sundli. Swathed in white robes and a golden crown, like a statue brought to life, her primal movements keep the party mood in full swing.

Neither age, past live shitshows nor line-up turbulence shall wither **DEICIDE**. Their headline set is a masterclass in barrelling, death metal deliverance with blasts that all but raise the dead kings in their burial grounds nearby. Groovier classics such as *Sacrificial Suicide* offer both respite and a chance to bang your head while still keeping it on your shoulders, and tonight they have primal energy in abundance.

SATURDAY

Featuring former Bolt Thrower members Karl Willetts and Andrew Whale, "token Anglo-Saxons" **MEMORIAM** also offer grim if ultimately celebratory tidings from a former age, both their guitar tone and Karl's vocals encased in true Birmingham grit and grime. Viking metallers, **EINHERJER** are a pure, fist-raising hit of adrenaline, their stripped-down yet imperious, stomp constantly building up in momentum as folk elements are woven in like barbed wire around a wooden club. The crowd, unsurprisingly, goes wild.

Playing on home turf, one of Norway's biggest extreme music exports **ENSLAVED** have promised a particularly unique performance tonight. As it turns out, the special feature is that they are joined onstage by a group of interpretive dancers, at first dressed in black sequins with giant ponytails, and later in gold bodysuits, writhing and crawling around the stage as the band play a set rich with progressive heaviness. It's a bit of a bemusing addition, but let's face it, you won't find an audience much more accepting of a little weirdness than Midgardsblot.

Heilung transport us to another realm

WITNESSING HEILUNG LIVE IS A SENSORY OVERLOAD

Witnessing **HEILUNG** live is a sensory overload, with the band clad in antlers, furs and warrior paint, clutching instruments made from skin and bones, blending animalistic howling with gloriously gorgeous wails, and at times surrounded by a wild warrior choir who turn the whole thing into a Viking rave. Tonight's performance, playing within the forest as the moon rises through the trees, feels particularly moving. At one point, a female member of the warrior tribe has her arms bound before being set free, spinning across the stage brandishing a pair of antlers set alight in flames. It's breathtaking to watch.

Like the festival's opening ritual three days earlier, Heilung encapsulate acceptance and community – in their own opening ritual before performing, the band cry: "Remember that we all are brothers!" – and transformation and rebirth: the word 'Heilung' translates to 'healing', and that's exactly what tonight's restorative performance achieves, tapping into something primal within us all, and, followed by a closing parade to the burial mounds, beautifully brings the journey of Midgardsblot full circle.

HANNAH MAY KILROY/JONATHAN SELZER

Enslaved: a perfect fusion of tradition and progression

Benny and Gustave bring closure to Midgardsblot

ROY BJØRGE

FIVE MINUTES WITH OSCAR DRONJAK HAMMERFALL

Inanimate objects stay the fuck out of his way. People are (mostly) fine, though

WORDS: ALI COOPER

What's the worst thing about being in a band?
"It's difficult to comprehend if you haven't done it a million times but the thing I hate the most is recording music videos. It's a day or two of sitting around doing nothing, then doing nothing again, then all of a sudden performing and keeping on your toes for five minutes, then you have to do nothing again for two hours. It's really hard on the concentration so I can imagine it must be excruciating on a movie set!"

What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?
"I took a lot of the advice that Dee Snider tried to instil into his listeners through Twisted Sister in the 80s – you're the one who's living your life so don't listen to what other people think you should do, do what you want to do. I took a lot of that to heart, I can't think of any better role model than Dee."

When was the first time you felt like a rockstar?
"The first time I realised what we were doing made a difference to people was when I first saw somebody in front of the stage when we were playing South America in 1999. They were looking up to where I was standing onstage and I gave them a guitar pick and they started crying, they couldn't contain their emotions anymore. I felt like The Beatles and it took me years to understand it."

What's been your worst experience on drugs?
"I've never done drugs in my entire life, I've never even smoked a cigarette. I don't believe in it at all; my stance has always been that if your life is so bad that you have to do drugs, there's something else that needs to change. I don't need artificial drugs, life is a drug enough for me!"

When was the last time you cried?
"I don't cry very often, but when I do it's usually because I'm watching an animal die in a movie. When I cry, it's always animal-related. The last time was probably when I watched King Kong fall off the Empire State Building! If I wasn't a musician, I probably would have worked with animals in some way."

You're an MMA fan. If you were in the octagon yourself, what would be your signature submission?
"I have always been very partial to the arm bar, I've loved that since day one. When I started watching MMA, I knew nothing about submissions but I always wondered how people can't get out of them – somebody has your arm, they don't have your whole body. Once you look at it and realise what they're doing with their legs, it's controlling your entire body."

Do you train yourself?
"I've always been a fan but I've never trained. Anders Johansson [ex-Hammerfall drummer] and I went to California nine years ago to train at a beginners' MMA class at Bas Rutten's gym. It was just for fun but I loved it so much, I thought I'd want to do it more but when I got back home, I realised my body couldn't take it."

You have the potential rage for it, though, right?
"I have a temperament and that's my problem; I yell and scream a lot when things don't go my way. It's not always directed at people, it's more often directed at things that fuck with me. If you put a knife on the table and the knife falls down, the knife did that intentionally. It gets worse when I play videogames, though, I can't control my anger so I've had to replace a few things over the years."

Which is your favourite Hammerfall era of all time?
"The one we're in right now because it feels like turning a new page with our line-up and our newfound energy. Things are very fun right now, we're in a really good place and it shows in the songwriting and performance on our new album, *Dominion*."

That's pretty confident…
"To me, this sounds as vital as our first album did, plus the songwriting this time was more fun than any writing session I have ever had – it felt more natural and organic than ever before."

"I FELT LIKE THE BEATLES"

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